

ENGLISH ROMANTIC POETS

Modern Essays in Criticism



SECOND EDITION

Edited by M.H. ABRAMS

ENGLISH ROMANTIC POETS

This page intentionally left blank

English Romantic Poets

MODERN ESSAYS IN CRITICISM

SECOND EDITION

Edited by M. H. ABRAMS

Cornell University

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

LONDON OXFORD NEW YORK

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Oxford London Glasgow

New York Toronto Melbourne Wellington

Nairobi Dar es Salaam Cape Town

Kuala Lumpur Singapore Jakarta Hong Kong Tokyo

Delhi Bombay Calcutta Madras Karachi

Copyright © 1975 by Oxford University Press, Inc.

Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number: 75-4205

First published by Oxford University Press, New York, 1975

First published as an Oxford University Press paperback, 1975

Printed in the United States of America

printing, last digit: 20 19 18 17 16 15 14

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

THIS BOOK brings together essays written during the last fifty years on the major English poets of the Romantic Age. Three of the essays are general; others focus upon individual writers or particular works. With the exception of A. O. Lovejoy's classic "Discrimination of Romanticisms," the emphasis is critical; those of the included writings which deal with literary history or with the life and ideas of a poet bring these materials to bear on the matter and mode of his poetry and on the interpretation and assessment of particular poems.

A new edition of this book provides the chance to leave out various essays which have been to some degree superseded and to add many others which represent current critical and scholarly developments. When the collection was put together in 1960 it included a number of essays, written in opposition to each other, which were part of the great debate about the Romantic achievement that began in the 1920's and 1930's. In the last two decades or so, that debate has largely been resolved in favor of the Romantic poets, to the extent that it has become common to claim that modern writers, who were earlier praised on the grounds that they were anti-Romantic, are in fact latter-day exemplars of Romantic innovations. Among the essays retained from the first edition, however, are several which represent the debate, since they are valuable in themselves and also serve as a prime index to the drastic shifts in sensibility and poetic standards during the generation or so just past. Items which have been added in the present edition are indicated in the Contents by an asterisk.

The original and added critiques cover the major poems by each of the major poets and also, taken together, represent the chief modern alignments in dealing with poetry—old criticism and new criticism, discursive and explicative, mimetic and rhetorical, literal and mythical, archetypal and phenomenological, pro and con. Within this spectrum,

PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

each contribution was chosen as a distinguished instance of its point of view.

The many scholars who have generously responded to my requests for counsel know the pain it cost to omit essays that demand admission by every criterion except the availability of space. But nature, Imlac observed, "sets her gifts on the right hand and on the left. . . . Of the blessings set before you, make your choice and be content."

M. H. ABRAMS

Ithaca, New York
November 1974

CONTENTS

The Romantic Period

- ARTHUR O. LOVEJOY On the Discrimination of Romanticisms 3
W. K. WIMSATT The Structure of Romantic Nature Imagery 25
M. H. ABRAMS The Correspondent Breeze: A Romantic Metaphor 37

Blake

- NORTHROP FRYE* Blake's Treatment of the Archetype 55
DAVID V. ERDMAN* Blake: The Historical Approach 72
ROBERT F. GLECKNER Point of View and Context in Blake's Songs 90
HAROLD BLOOM* Blake's Apocalypse: 'Jerusalem' 98

Wordsworth

- BASIL WILLEY On Wordsworth and the Locke Tradition 112
GEOFFREY H. HARTMAN* Nature and the Humanization of the Self in
Wordsworth 123
PAUL D. SHEATS* The 'Lyrical Ballads' 133
LIONEL TRILLING The Immortality Ode 149
JONATHAN WORDSWORTH* Wordsworth's 'Borderers' 170

Coleridge

- G. M. HARPER Coleridge's Conversation Poems 188
G. W. KNIGHT Coleridge's Divine Comedy 202
HUMPHRY HOUSE The Ancient Mariner 214
REEVE PARKER* 'To William Wordsworth': Coleridge and the Art of
Analogy 240

* *Essays added to this edition.*

CONTENTS

Byron

- T. S. ELIOT Byron 261
W. W. ROBSON* Byron and Sincerity 275
HELEN GARDNER* Don Juan 303
GEORGE M. RIDENOUR* 'Don Juan': The English Cantos 313

Shelley

- C. S. LEWIS Shelley, Dryden, and Mr. Eliot 324
F. R. LEAVIS Shelley 345
FREDERICK A. POTTLE The Case of Shelley 366
EARL R. WASSERMAN* 'Prometheus Unbound': The Premises and the
 Mythic Mode 384

Keats

- W. JACKSON BATE Keats's Style: Evolution toward Qualities of Permanent
 Value 411
CLEANTH BROOKS Keats's Sylvan Historian 425
RICHARD H. FOGLE A Note on 'Ode to a Nightingale' 436
ARNOLD DAVENPORT* A Note on 'To Autumn' 441
JACK STILLINGER* The Hoodwinking of Madeline: Skepticism in
 'The Eve of St. Agnes' 448
STUART M. SPERRY* Tragic Irony in 'The Fall of Hyperion' 470

ENGLISH ROMANTIC POETS

This page intentionally left blank

On the Discrimination of Romanticisms

I

WE APPROACH a centenary not, perhaps, wholly undeserving of notice on the part of this learned company. It was apparently in 1824 that those respected citizens of La-Ferté-sous-Jouarre, MM. Dupuis and Cotonet, began an enterprise which was to cause them, as is recorded, 'twelve years of suffering,' and to end in disillusionment—the enterprise of discovering what Romanticism is, by collecting definitions and characterizations of it given by eminent authorities. I conjecture, therefore, that one of the purposes of the Committee in inviting me to speak on this subject was perhaps to promote a Dupuis and Cotonet Centennial Exhibition, in which the later varieties of definitions of Romanticism, the fruit of a hundred years' industry on the part of literary critics and professors of modern literature, might be at least in part displayed. Certainly there is no lack of material; the contemporary collector of such articles, while paying tribute to the assiduity and the sufferings of those worthy pioneers of a century ago, will chiefly feel an envious sense of the relative simplicity of their task. He will find, also, that the apparent incongruity of the senses in which the term is employed has fairly kept pace with their increase in number; and that the singular potency which the subject has from the first possessed to excite controversy and breed divisions has in no degree diminished with the lapse of years.

For if some Dupuis of to-day were to gather, first, merely a few of the more recent accounts of the origin and age of Romanticism, he would learn from M. Lassere¹ and many others that Rousseau was the father of

From *Essays in the History of Ideas* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1948), pp. 228–53. Copyright © 1948 by the Johns Hopkins University Press. Reprinted by permission of the publisher and author

it; from Mr. Russell² and Mr. Santayana³ that the honor of paternity might plausibly be claimed by Immanuel Kant; from M. Seillière that its grandparents were Fénelon and Madame Guyon;⁴ from Professor Babbitt that its earliest well-identified forebear was Francis Bacon;⁵ from Mr. Gosse that it originated in the bosom of the Reverend Joseph Warton;⁶ from the late Professor Ker that it had 'its beginnings in the seventeenth-century' or a little earlier, in such books as 'the *Arcadia* or the *Grand Cyrus*';⁷ from Mr. J. E. G. de Montmorency that it 'was born in the eleventh century, and sprang from that sense of aspiration which runs through the Anglo-French, or rather, the Anglo-Norman Renaissance';⁸ from Professor Grierson that St. Paul's 'irruption into Greek religious thought and Greek prose' was an essential example of 'a romantic movement,' though the 'first great romantic' was Plato;⁹ and from Mr. Charles Whibley that the *Odyssey* is romantic in its 'very texture and essence,' but that, with its rival, Romanticism was 'born in the Garden of Eden' and that 'the Serpent was the first romantic.'¹⁰ The inquirer would, at the same time, find that many of these originators of Romanticism—including both the first and last mentioned, whom, indeed, some contemporaries are unable to distinguish—figure on other lists as initiators or representatives of tendencies of precisely the contrary sort.

These differing versions of the age and lineage of Romanticism are matched by a corresponding diversity in the descriptions offered by those of our time who have given special care to the observation of it. For Professor Ker Romanticism was 'the fairy way of writing,'¹¹ and for Mr. Gosse it is inconsistent with 'keeping to the facts';¹² but for Mr. F. Y. Eccles¹³ (following M. Pellissier) 'the romantic system of ideas' is the direct source of 'the realistic error,' of the tendency to conceive of psychology as 'the dry notation of purely physiological phenomena' and consequently to reduce the novel and the drama to the description of 'the automaton-like gestures of *la bête humaine*.' To Professor Ker, again, 'romantic' implies 'reminiscence': 'the romantic schools have always depended more or less on the past.'¹⁴ Similarly Mr. Geoffrey Scott finds 'its most typical form' to be 'the cult of the extinct.'¹⁵ But Professor Schelling tells us that 'the classic temper studies the past, the romantic temper neglects it; . . . it leads us forward and creates new precedents';¹⁶ while for some of the French 'Romantic' critics of the 1820s and 1830s, the slogan of the movement was *il faut être de son temps*.¹⁷ Mr. Paul Elmer More defines Romanticism as 'the illusion of beholding the infinite within the stream of nature itself, instead of apart from that stream'—in short, as an apotheosis of the cosmic flux;¹⁸ but a special student of

German Romanticism cites as typical Romantic utterances Friedrich Schlegel's 'alles Sichtbare hat nur die Wahrheit einer Allegorie,' and Goethe's 'alles Vergängliche ist nur ein Gleichnis';¹⁹ and for a recent German author the deepest thing in Romanticism is 'eine Religion die dieses Leben hasst . . . Romantik will die gerade Verbindung des Menschlichen mit dem Überirdischen.'²⁰ Among those for whom the word implies, *inter alia*, a social and political ideology and temper, one writer, typical of many, tells us that 'Romanticism spells anarchy in every domain . . . a systematic hostility to everyone invested with any particle of social authority—husband or *pater-familias*, policeman or magistrate, priest or Cabinet minister';²¹ but Professor Goetz Briefs finds 'the climax of political and economic thought within the Romantic movement' in the doctrine of Adam Müller, which sought to vindicate the sanctity of established social authority embodied in the family and the state; 'by an inescapable logic the Romanticist ideology was drawn into the camp of reaction.'²² From M. Seillière's most celebrated work it appears that the Romantic mind tends to be affected with an inferiority-complex, une impression d'incomplétude, de solitude morale, et presque d'angoisse';²³ from other passages of the same writer we learn that Romanticism is the 'imperialistic' mood, whether in individuals or nations—a too confident assertion of the will-to-power, arising from 'the mystic feeling that one's activities have the advantages of a celestial alliance.'²⁴ The function of the human mind which is to be regarded as peculiarly 'romantic' is for some 'the heart as opposed to the head,'²⁵ for others, 'the Imagination, as contrasted with Reason and the Sense of Fact'²⁶—which I take to be ways of expressing a by no means synonymous pair of psychological antitheses. Typical manifestations of the spiritual essence of Romanticism have been variously conceived to be a passion for moonlight, for red waistcoats, for Gothic churches, for futurist paintings;²⁷ for talking exclusively about oneself, for hero-worship, for losing oneself in an ecstatic contemplation of nature.

The offspring with which Romanticism is credited are as strangely assorted as its attributes and its ancestors. It is by different historians—sometimes by the same historians—supposed to have begotten the French Revolution and the Oxford Movement; the Return to Rome and the Return to the State of Nature; the philosophy of Hegel, the philosophy of Schopenhauer, and the philosophy of Nietzsche—than which few other three philosophies more nearly exhaust the rich possibilities of philosophic disagreement; the revival of neo-Platonic mysticism in a Coleridge or an Alcott, the Emersonian transcendentalism, and scientific material-

ism; Wordsworth and Wilde; Newman and Huxley; the Waverley novels, the *Comédie Humaine*, and *Les Rougon-Macquart*. M. Seillière and Professor Babbitt have been especially active in tracing the progeny of Romanticism in the past century; the extraordinary number and still more extraordinary diversity of the descendants of it discovered by their researches are known to all here, and it therefore suffices to refer to their works for further examples.

All this is a mere hint, a suggestion by means of random samples, of the richness of the collection which might be brought together for our Centennial Exposition. The result is a confusion of terms, and of ideas, beside which that of a hundred years ago—mind-shaking though it was to the honest inquirers of La-Ferté-sous-Jouarre—seems pure lucidity. The word 'romantic' has come to mean so many things that, by itself, it means nothing. It has ceased to perform the function of a verbal sign. When a man is asked, as I have had the honor of being asked, to discuss Romanticism, it is impossible to know what ideas or tendencies he is to talk about, when they are supposed to have flourished, or in whom they are supposed to be chiefly exemplified. Perhaps there are some who think the rich ambiguity of the word not regrettable. In 1824, as Victor Hugo then testified, there were those who preferred to leave *à ce mot de romantique un certain vague fantastique et indéfinissable qui en redouble l'horreur*, and it may be that the taste is not extinct. But for one of the philosopher's trade, at least, the situation is embarrassing and exasperating; for philosophers, in spite of a popular belief to the contrary, are persons who suffer from a morbid solicitude to know what they are talking about.

Least of all does it seem possible, while the present uncertainty concerning the nature and *locus* of Romanticism prevails, to take sides in the controversy which still goes on so briskly with respect to its merits, the character of its general influence upon art and life. To do so would be too much like consenting to sit on a jury to try a criminal not yet identified, for a series of apparently incompatible crimes, before a bench of learned judges engaged in accusing one another of being accessories to whatever mischief has been done. It is to be observed, for example, that Messrs. Lasserre, Seillière, Babbitt and More (to mention no others) are engaged in arguing that something called Romanticism is the chief cause of the spiritual evils from which the nineteenth century and our own have suffered; but that they represent at least three different opinions as to what these evils are and how they are to be remedied. M. Lasserre, identifying Romanticism with the essential spirit of the French

Revolution, finds the chief cause of our woes in that movement's breach with the past, in its discarding of the ancient traditions of European civilization; and he consequently seeks the cure in a return to an older faith and an older political and social order, and in an abandonment of the optimistic fatalism generated by the idea of progress. M. Seillière, however, holds that 'the spirit of the Revolution in that in which it is rational, Stoic, Cartesian, classical . . . is justified, enduring, assured of making its way in the world more and more';²⁸ and that, consequently, the ill name of Romanticism should be applied to the revolutionary movement only where it has deviated from its true course, in 'the social mysticism, the communistic socialism of the present time.' He therefore intimates that the school of opinion which M. Lasserre ably represents is itself a variety of Romanticism.²⁹ But it is equally certain that M. Seillière's own philosophy is one of the varieties of Romanticism defined by Mr. Babbitt and Mr. More; while Mr. Babbitt, in turn, has been declared by more than one of the critics of his last brilliant book, and would necessarily be held by M. Seillière, to set forth therein an essentially Romantic philosophy. Thus Professor Herford says of it (justly or otherwise) that its 'temper is not that of a "positivist" of any school, but of a mystic,' and that 'it is as foreign to Homer and Sophocles, the exemplars of true classicism if any are, as it is to Aristotle.'³⁰

What, then, can be done to clear up, or to diminish, this confusion of terminology and of thought which has for a century been the scandal of literary history and criticism, and is still, as it would not be difficult to show, copiously productive of historical errors and of dangerously indiscriminating diagnoses of the moral and aesthetic maladies of our age? The one really radical remedy—namely, that we should all cease talking about Romanticism—is, I fear, certain not to be adopted. It would probably be equally futile to attempt to prevail upon scholars and critics to restrict their use of the term to a single and reasonably well-defined sense. Such a proposal would only be the starting-point of a new controversy. Men, and especially philologists, will doubtless go on using words as they like, however much annoyance they cause philosophers by this unchartered freedom. There are, however, two possible historical inquiries which, if carried out more thoroughly and carefully than has yet been done, would, I think, do much to rectify the present muddle, and would at the same time promote a clearer understanding of the general movement of ideas, the logical and psychological relations between the chief episodes and transitions, in modern thought and taste.

One of these measures would be somewhat analogous to the pro-

cedure of contemporary psychopathologists in the treatment of certain types of disorder. It has, we are told, been found that some mental disturbances can be cured or alleviated by making the patient explicitly aware of the genesis of his troublesome 'complex,' i. e., by enabling him to reconstruct those processes of association of ideas through which it was formed. Similarly in the present case, I think, it would be useful to trace the associative processes through which the word 'romantic' has attained its present amazing diversity, and consequent uncertainty, of connotation and denotation; in other words, to carry out an adequate semasiological study of the term. For one of the few things certain about Romanticism is that the name of it offers one of the most complicated, fascinating, and instructive of all problems in semantics. It is, in short, a part of the task of the historian of ideas, when he applies himself to the study of the thing or things called Romanticism, to render it, if possible, psychologically intelligible how such manifold and discrepant phenomena have all come to receive one name. Such an analysis would, I am convinced, show us a large mass of purely verbal confusions operative as actual factors in the movement of thought in the past century and a quarter; and it would, by making these confusions explicit, make it easier to avoid them.

But this inquiry would in practice, for the most part, be inseparable from a second, which is the remedy that I wish, on this occasion, especially to recommend. The first step in this second mode of treatment of the disorder is that we should learn to use the word 'Romanticism' in the plural. This, of course, is already the practice of the more cautious and observant literary historians, in so far as they recognize that the 'Romanticism' of one country may have little in common with that of another, and at all events ought to be defined in distinctive terms. But the discrimination of the Romanticisms which I have in mind is not solely or chiefly a division upon lines of nationality or language. What is needed is that any study of the subject should begin with a recognition of a *prima-facie* plurality of Romanticisms, of possibly quite distinct thought-complexes, a number of which may appear in one country. There is no hope of clear thinking on the part of the student of modern literature, if—as, alas! has been repeatedly done by eminent writers—he vaguely hypostatizes the term, and starts with the presumption that 'Romanticism' is the heaven-appointed designation of some single real entity, or type of entities, to be found in nature. He must set out from the simple and obvious fact that there are various historic episodes or movements to which different historians of our own or other periods have,

for one reason or another, given the name. There is a movement which began in Germany in the seventeen-nineties—the only one which has an indisputable title to be called Romanticism, since it invented the term for its own use. There is another movement which began pretty definitely in England in the seventeen-forties. There is a movement which began in France in 1801. There is another movement which began in France in the second decade of the century, is linked with the German movement, and took over the German name. There is the rich and incongruous collection of ideas to be found in Rousseau. There are numerous other things called Romanticism by various writers whom I cited at the outset. The fact that the same name has been given by different scholars to all of these episodes is no evidence, and scarcely even establishes a presumption, that they are identical in essentials. There may be some common denominator of them all; but if so, it has never yet been clearly exhibited, and its presence is not to be assumed *a priori*. In any case, each of these so-called Romanticisms was a highly complex and usually an exceedingly unstable intellectual compound; each, in other words, was made up of various unit-ideas linked together, for the most part, not by any indissoluble bonds of logical necessity, but by alogical associative processes, greatly facilitated and partly caused, in the case of the Romanticisms which grew up after the appellation 'Romantic' was invented, by the congenital and acquired ambiguities of the word. And when certain of these Romanticisms have in truth significant elements in common, they are not necessarily the same elements in any two cases. Romanticism A may have one characteristic presupposition or impulse, X, which it shares with Romanticism B, another characteristic, Y, which it shares with Romanticism C, to which X is wholly foreign. In the case, moreover, of those movements or schools to which the label was applied in their own time, the contents under the label sometimes changed radically and rapidly. At the end of a decade or two you had the same men and the same party appellation, but profoundly different ideas. As everyone knows, this is precisely what happened in the case of what is called French Romanticism. It may or may not be true that, as M. A. Viatte has sought to show,³¹ at the beginning of this process of transformation some subtle leaven was already at work which made the final outcome inevitable; the fact remains that in most of its practically significant sympathies and affiliations of a literary, ethical, political, and religious sort, the French 'Romanticism' of the eighteen-thirties was the antithesis of that of the beginning of the century.

But the essential of the second remedy is that each of these Romanti-

cisms—after they are first thus roughly discriminated with respect to their representatives or their dates—should be resolved, by a more thorough and discerning analysis than is yet customary, into its elements—into the several ideas and aesthetic susceptibilities of which it is composed. Only after these fundamental thought-factors or emotive strains in it are clearly discriminated and fairly exhaustively enumerated, shall we be in a position to judge of the degree of its affinity with other complexes to which the same name has been applied, to see precisely what tacit preconceptions or controlling motives or explicit contentions were common to any two or more of them, and wherein they manifested distinct and divergent tendencies.

II

Of the needfulness of such analytic comparison and discrimination of the Romanticisms let me attempt three illustrations.

1. In an interesting lecture before the British Academy a few years since, Mr. Edmund Gosse described Joseph Warton's youthful poem, *The Enthusiast*, written in 1740, as the first clear manifestation of 'the great romantic movement, such as it has enlarged and dwindled down to our day. . . . Here for the first time we find unwaveringly emphasized and repeated what was entirely new in literature, the essence of romantic hysteria. *The Enthusiast* is the earliest expression of complete revolt against the classical attitude which had been sovereign in all European literature for nearly a century. So completely is this expressed by Joseph Warton that it is extremely difficult to realize that he could not have come under the fascination of Rousseau, . . . who was not to write anything characteristic until ten years later.'³² Let us, then, compare the ideas distinctive of this poem with the conception of *romantische Poesie* formulated by Friedrich Schlegel and his fellow-Romanticists in Germany after 1796. The two have plainly certain common elements. Both are forms of revolt against the neo-classical aesthetics; both are partly inspired by an ardent admiration for Shakespeare; both proclaim the creative artist's independence of 'rules.' It might at first appear, therefore, that these two Romanticisms, in spite of natural differences of phraseology, are identical in essence—are separate outcroppings of the same vein of metal, precious or base, according to your taste.

But a more careful scrutiny shows a contrast between them not less important—indeed, as it seems to me, more important—than their resemblance. The general theme of Joseph Warton's poem (of which, it

will be remembered, the sub-title is 'The Lover of Nature') is one which had been a commonplace for many centuries: the superiority of 'nature' to 'art.' It is a theme which goes back to Rabelais's contrast of Physis and Antiphysie. It had been the inspiration of some of the most famous passages of Montaigne. It had been attacked by Shakespeare. Pope's *Essay on Man* had been full of it. The 'natural' in contrast with the artificial meant, first of all, that which is not man-made; and within man's life, it was supposed to consist in those expressions of human nature which are most spontaneous, unpremeditated, untouched by reflection or design, and free from the bondage of social convention. 'Ce n'est pas raison,' cried Montaigne, 'que l'art gagne le point d'honneur sur notre grande et puissante mère Nature. Nous avons tant rechargé la beauté et richesse de ses ouvrages par nos inventions, que nous l'avons tout à fait étouffée.' There follows the *locus classicus* of primitivism in modern literature, the famous passage on the superiority of wild fruits and savage men over those that have been 'bastardized' by art.⁸³

Warton, then, presents this ancient theme in various aspects. He prefers to all the beauties of the gardens of Versailles

Some pine-topt precipice
Abrupt and shaggy.

He rhetorically inquires:

Can Kent design like Nature?

He laments

That luxury and pomp . . .
Should proudly banish Nature's simple charms.

He inquires why 'mistaken man' should deem it nobler

To dwell in palaces and high-roof'd halls
Than in God's forests, architect supreme?

All this, if I may be permitted the expression, was old stuff. The principal thing that was original and significant in the poem was that Warton boldly applied the doctrine of the superiority of 'nature' over conscious art to the theory of poetry:

What are the lays of artful Addison,
Coldly correct, to Shakespeare's warblings wild?

That Nature herself was wild, untamed, was notorious, almost tautological; and it was Shakespeare's supposed 'wildness,' his non-conformity to the conventional rules, the spontaneous freedom of his imagination and his expression, that proved him Nature's true pupil.

Now this aesthetic inference had not, during the neo-classical period, ordinarily been drawn from the current assumption of the superiority of nature to art. The principle of 'following nature' had in aesthetics usually been taken in another, or in more than one other, of the several dozen senses of the sacred word.³⁴ Yet in other provinces of thought an analogous inference had long since and repeatedly been suggested. From the first the fashion of conceiving of 'nature' (in the sense in which it was antithetic to 'art') as norm had made for antinomianism, in some degree or other—for a depreciation of restraint, for the ideal of 'letting yourself go.' There seems to be an idea current that an antinomian temper was, at some time in the eighteenth century, introduced into aesthetic theory and artistic practise by some Romanticist, and that it thence speedily spread to moral feeling and social conduct.³⁵ The historic sequence is precisely the opposite. It was Montaigne again—not usually classified as a Romanticist—who wrote:

J'ai pris bien simplement et crûment ce précepte ancien: 'que nous ne saurions faillir à suivre Nature' . . . Je n'ai pas corrigé, comme Socrate, par la force de la raison, mes complexions naturelles, je n'ai aucunement troublé, par art, mon inclination; je me laisse aller comme je suis venu; je ne combats rien.³⁶

It was Pope who asked:

Can that offend great Nature's God
Which Nature's self inspires?

and who spoke of

Wild Nature's vigor working at the root

as the source of the passions in which all the original and vital energies of men are contained.

Aside from a certain heightening of the emotional tone, then, the chief novelty of Warton's poem lay in its suggesting the application of these ideas to a field from which they had usually been curiously and inconsistently excluded, in its introduction of antinomianism, of a rather

mild sort, into the conception of poetic excellence.³⁷ But this extension was obviously implicit from the outset in the logic of that protean 'naturalism' which had been the most characteristic and potent force in modern thought since the late Renaissance; it was bound to be made by somebody sooner or later. Nor was Warton's the first aesthetic application of the principle; it had already been applied to an art in the theory and practice of which eighteenth-century Englishmen were keenly interested—the art of landscape design. The first great revolt against the neo-classical aesthetics was not in literature at all, but in gardening; the second, I think, was in architectural taste; and all three were inspired by the same ideas.³⁸ Since, the 'artful Addison' had observed, 'artificial works receive a greater advantage from their resemblance of such as are natural,' and since Nature is distinguished by her 'rough, careless strokes,' the layer-out of gardens should aim at 'an artificial rudeness much more charming than that neatness and elegancy usually met with.'³⁹ This horticultural Romanticism had been preached likewise by Sir William Temple, Pope, Horace Walpole, Batty Langley, and others, and ostensibly exemplified in the work of Kent, Brown, and Bridgman. Warton in the poem in question describes Kent as at least doing his best to imitate in his gardens the wildness of Nature:

He, by rules unfettered, boldly scorns
Formality and method; round and square
Disdaining, plans irregularly great.

It was no far cry from this to the rejection of the rules in the drama, to a revulsion against the strait-laced regularity and symmetry of the heroic couplet, to a general turning from convention, formality, method, artifice, in all the arts.

There had, however, from the first been a curious duality of meaning in the antithesis of 'nature' and 'art'—one of the most pregnant of the long succession of confusions of ideas which make up much of the history of human thought. While the 'natural' was, on the one hand, conceived as the wild and spontaneous and 'irregular,' it was also conceived as the simple, the naïve, the unsophisticated. No two words were more fixedly associated in the mind of the sixteenth, seventeenth, and early eighteenth centuries than 'Nature' and 'simple.' Consequently the idea of preferring nature to custom and to art usually carried with it the suggestion of a program of simplification, of reform by elimination; in other words, it implied primitivism. The 'natural' was a thing you

reached by going back and by leaving out. And this association of ideas—already obvious in Montaigne, in Pope, and scores of other extollers of 'Nature'—is still conspicuous in Warton's poem. It was the 'bards of old' who were 'fair Nature's friends.' The poet envies

The first of men, ere yet confined
In smoky cities.

He yearns to dwell in some

Isles of innocence from mortal view
Deeply retired beneath a plantane's shade,
Where Happiness and Quiet sit enthroned,
With simple Indian swains.

For one term of the comparison, then, I limit myself, for brevity's sake, to this poem to which Mr. Gosse has assigned so important a place in literary history. There were, of course, even in the writings of the elder Warton, and still more in other phenomena frequently called 'Romantic,' between the 1740's and the 1790's, further elements which cannot be considered here. There is observable, for example, in what it has become the fashion to classify as the early phases of English Romanticism, the emergence of what may be called gothicism, and the curious fact of its partial and temporary fusion with naturalism. It is one of the interesting problems of the analytic history of ideas to see just how and why naturalism and gothicism became allied in the eighteenth century in England, though little, if at all, in France. But for the present purpose it suffices to take *The Enthusiast* as typical, in one especially important way, of a great deal of the so-called Romanticism before the seventeen-nineties—a Romanticism, namely, which, whatever further characteristics it may have had, was based upon naturalism (in the sense of the word which I have indicated) and was associated with primitivism of some mode or degree.

2. For in this fundamental point this earlier 'Romanticism' differed essentially from that of the German aesthetic theorists and poets who chose the term 'Romantic poetry' as the most suitable designation for their own literary ideals and program. The latter 'Romanticism' is in its very essence a denial of the older naturalistic presuppositions, which Warton's poem had manifested in a special and somewhat novel way. The German movement, as I have elsewhere shown, received its immediate and decisive impetus from Schiller's essay *On Naïve and Senti-*

mental Poetry; and what it derived from that confused work was the conviction that 'harmony with nature,' in any sense which implied an opposition to 'culture,' to 'art,' to reflection and self-conscious effort, was neither possible nor desirable for the modern man or the modern artist. The *Frühromantiker* learned from Schiller, and partly from Herder, the idea of an art which should look back no more to the primitive than to the classical—the notions of which, incidentally, Schiller had curiously fused—for its models and ideals; which should be the appropriate expression, not of a *natürliche* but of a *künstliche Bildung*; which, so far from desiring simplification, so far from aiming at the sort of harmony in art and life which is to be attained by the method of leaving out, should seek first fullness of content, should have for its program the adequate expression of the entire range of human experience and the entire reach of the human imagination. For man, the artificial, Friedrich Schlegel observed, is 'natural.' 'Die Abstraktion ist ein künstlicher Zustand. Dies ist kein Grund gegen sie, denn es ist dem Menschen gewiss natürlich, sich dann und wann auch in künstliche Zustände zu versetzen.' And again: 'Eine nur im Gegensatz der Kunst und Bildung natürliche Denkart soll es gar nicht geben.' To be unsophisticated, to revert to the mental state of 'simple Indian swains,' was the least of the ambitions of a German Romantic—though, since the unsophisticated is one type of human character, his art was not, at least in theory, indifferent even to that. The Shakespeare whom he admired was no gifted child of nature addicted to 'warblings wild.' Shakespeare, said A. W. Schlegel, is not 'eine blindes wildlaufendes Genie'; he had 'a system in his artistic practise and an astonishingly profound and deeply meditated one.' The same critic seems to be consciously attacking either Joseph Warton's or Gray's famous lines about Shakespeare when he writes: "Those poets whom it is customary to represent as carefree nurslings of nature, without art and without schooling, if they produce works of genuine excellence, give evidence of exceptional cultivation (*Kultur*) of their mental powers, of practised art, of ripely pondered and just designs." The greatness of Shakespeare, in the eyes of *these* Romantics, lay in his *Universalität*, his sophisticated insight into human nature and the many-sidedness of his portrayal of character; it was this, as Friedrich Schlegel said, that made him 'wie der Mittelpunkt der romantischen Kunst.' It may be added that another trait of the Romanticism found by Mr. Gosse in Joseph Warton, namely, the feeling that didactic poetry is not poetic, was also repudiated by early German Romanticism: 'How,' asked F. Schlegel again, 'can it be said that ethics (*die Moral*) belongs merely to phi-

losophy, when the greatest part of poetry relates to the art of living and to the knowledge of human nature?'⁴⁰

The difference, then, I suggest, is more significant, more pregnant, than the likeness between these two Romanticisms. Between the assertion of the superiority of 'nature' over conscious 'art' and that of the superiority of conscious art over mere 'nature'; between a way of thinking of which primitivism is of the essence and one of which the idea of perpetual self-transcendence is of the essence; between a fundamental preference for simplicity—even though a 'wild' simplicity—and a fundamental preference for diversity and complexity; between the sort of ingenuous naïveté characteristic of *The Enthusiast* and the sophisticated subtlety of the conception of romantic irony: between these the antithesis is one of the most radical that modern thought and taste have to show. I don't deny anyone's right to call both these things Romanticism, if he likes; but I cannot but observe that the fashion of giving both the same name has led to a good deal of unconscious falsification of the history of ideas. The elements of the one Romanticism tend to be read into the other; the nature and profundity of the oppositions between them tend to be overlooked; and the relative importance of the different changes of preconceptions in modern thought, and of susceptibilities in modern taste, tends to be wrongly estimated. I shall not attempt to cite here what seem to me examples of such historical errors; but the sum of them is, I think, far from negligible.

Between the 'Romanticism' which is but a special and belated manifestation of the naturalism that had flourished since the Renaissance (and before it) and the 'Romanticism' which began at the end of the eighteenth century in Germany (as well as that which appeared a little later in France) there is another difference not less significant. This is due to the identification of the meaning of 'Romantic' in the later movement with 'Christian'—and mainly with the medieval implications of that term. This was not the central idea in the original notion of 'Romantic poetry' as conceived by Friedrich Schlegel. Primarily, as I have elsewhere tried to show,⁴¹ the adjective meant for him and the entire school 'das eigentümlich Moderne' in contrast with 'das eigentümlich Antike.' But it early occurred to him that the principal historic cause of the supposed radical differentiation of modern from classical art could lie only in the influence of Christianity. He wrote in 1796, before his own conversion to what he had already defined as the 'Romantic,' *i. e.*, modern, point of view:

So lächerlich und geschmacklos sich dieses Trachten nach dem Reich Gottes in der christlichen Poesie offenbaren möchte; so wird es dem Geschichtsforscher doch eine sehr merkwürdige Erscheinung, wenn er gewahr wird, dass eben dieses Streben, das absolut Vollkommene und Unendliche zu realisiren, eine unter dem unaufhörlichen Wechsel der Zeiten und bei der grössten Verschiedenheit der Völker bleibende Eigenschaft dessen ist, was man mit dem besten Rechte modern nennen darf.⁴²

When, after reading Schiller's essay, Schlegel himself became a devotee of those aesthetic ideals which he had previously denounced, he wrote (1797):

Nachdem die vollendete natürliche Bildung der Alten entschieden gesunken, und ohne Rettung ausgeartet war, ward durch den Verlust der endlichen Realität und die Zerrüttung vollendeter Form ein Streben nach unendlicher Realität veranlasst, welches bald allgemeiner Ton des Zeitalters wurde.⁴³

'Romantic' art thus came to mean—for one thing—an art inspired by or expressive of some idea or some ethical temper supposed to be essential in Christianity. 'Ursprung und Charakter der ganzen neuern Poesie lässt sich so leicht aus dem Christentume ableiten, dass man die romantische eben so gut die christliche nennen könnte.'⁴⁴ said Richter in 1804, repeating what had by that time become a commonplace. But the nature of the essentially Christian, and therefore essentially Romantic, spirit was variously conceived. Upon one characteristic of it there was, indeed, rather general agreement among the German Romanticists: the habit of mind introduced by Christianity was distinguished by a certain insatiability; it aimed at infinite objectives and was incapable of lasting satisfaction with any goods actually reached. It became a favorite platitude to say that the Greeks and Romans set themselves limited ends to attain, were able to attain them, and were thus capable of self-satisfaction and finality; and that modern or 'romantic' art differed from this most fundamentally, by reason of its Christian origin, in being, as Schiller had said, a *Kunst des Unendlichen*. 'Absolute Abstraktion, Vernichtung des Jetzigen, Apotheose der Zukunft, dieser eigentlich bessern Welt!; dies ist der Kern des Geheisses des Christentums,' declared Novalis. In its application to artistic practice this 'apotheosis of the future' meant the ideal of endless progress, of 'eine progressive Universal-poesie' in the words of Fr. Schlegel's familiar definition; it implied the demand that art shall always go on bringing new provinces of

life within its domain and achieving ever fresh and original effects. But anything which was, or was supposed to be, especially characteristic of the Christian *Weltanschauung* tended to become a part of the current connotation of 'Romantic,' and also a part of the actual ideals of the school. Preoccupation with supersensible realities and a feeling of the illusoriness of ordinary existence was thus often held to be a distinctive trait of Romantic art, on the ground that Christianity is an otherworldly religion: 'in der christlichen Ansicht,' said A. W. Schlegel, 'die Anschauung des Unendlichen hat das Endliche vernichtet; das Leben ist zur Schattenwelt und zur Nacht geworden.'⁴⁵ Another recognized characteristic of Christianity, and therefore of the 'Romantic,' was ethical dualism, a conviction that there are in man's constitution two natures ceaselessly at war. The Greek ideal, in the elder Schlegel's words, was 'vollkommene Eintracht und Ebenmass aller Kräfte, natürliche Harmonie. Die Neueren hingegen sind zum Bewusstsein der inneren Entzweiung gekommen, welche ein solches Ideal unmöglich macht.'⁴⁶ Directly related to this, it was perceived, was the 'inwardness' of Christianity, its preoccupation with 'the heart' as distinguished from the outward act, its tendency to introspection; and hence, as Mme de Stael and others observed, 'modern' or 'Romantic' art has discovered, and has for its peculiar province, the inexhaustible realm of the inner life of man:

Les anciens avaient, pour ainsi dire, une âme corporelle, dont tous les mouvements étaient forts, directs, et conséquents; il n'en est pas de même du cœur humain développé par le christianisme: les modernes ont puisé dans le repentir chrétien l'habitude de se replier continuellement sur eux-mêmes. Mais, pour manifester cette existence tout intérieure, il faut qu'une grande variété dans les faits présente sous toutes les formes les nuances infinies de ce qui se passe dans l'âme.⁴⁷

It is one of the many paradoxes of the history of the word, and of the controversies centering about it, that several eminent literary historians and critics of our time have conceived the moral essence of Romanticism as consisting in a kind of 'this-worldliness' and a negation of what one of them has termed 'the Christian and classical dualism.' Its most deplorable and dangerous error, in the judgment of these critics, is its deficient realization of the 'civil war in the cave' of man's soul, its belief in the 'natural goodness' of man. They thus define 'Romanticism' in terms precisely opposite to those in which it was often defined by the writers who first called their own ideals 'Romantic'; and this fashion, I cannot but think, has done a good deal to obscure the palpable and important

historical fact that the one 'Romanticism' which (as I have said) has an indisputable title to the name was conceived by those writers as a re-discovery and revival, for better or worse, of characteristically Christian modes of thought and feeling, of a mystical and otherworldly type of religion, and a sense of the inner moral struggle as the distinctive fact in human experience—such as had been for a century alien to the dominant tendencies in 'polite' literature. The new movement was, almost from the first, a revolt against what was conceived to be paganism in religion and ethics as definitely as against classicism in art. The earliest important formulation of its implications for religious philosophy was Schleiermacher's famous *Reden* (1799) addressed 'to the cultivated contemners of religion,' a work profoundly—sometimes, indeed, morbidly—dualistic in its ethical temper. Christianity, declares Schleiermacher, is *durch und durch polemisch*; it knows no truce in the warfare of the spiritual with the natural man, it finds no end in the task of inner self-discipline. And the *Reden*, it must be remembered, were (in the words of a German literary historian) 'greeted by the votaries of Romanticism as a gospel.'

Now it is not untrue to describe the ethical tendency of the 'Romanticism' which had its roots in naturalism—that is, in the assumption of the sole excellence of what in man is native, primitive, 'wild,' attainable without other struggle than that required for emancipation from social conventions and artificialities—as anti-dualistic and essentially non-moral. This aspect of it can be seen even in the poem of the 'blameless Warton,' when he describes the life of the state of nature for which he yearns. But as a consequence of the prevalent neglect to discriminate the Romanticisms, the very movement which was the beginning of a deliberate and vigorous insurrection against the naturalistic assumptions that had been potent, and usually dominant, in modern thought for more than three centuries, is actually treated as if it were a continuation of that tendency. Thesis and antithesis have, partly through accidents of language and partly through a lack of careful observation on the part of historians of literature, been called by the same name, and consequently have frequently been assumed to be the same thing. An ideal of ceaseless striving towards goals too vast or too exacting ever to be wholly attained has been confused with a nostalgia for the untroubled, because unaspiring, indolent, and unselfconscious life of the man of nature. Thus one of the widest and deepest-reaching lines of cleavage in modern thought has been more or less effectually concealed by a word.

3. This cleavage between naturalistic and anti-naturalistic 'Romanti-

cism' crosses national lines; and it manifestly cuts, so to say, directly through the person of one great writer commonly classed among the initiators of the Romantic movement in France. The author of the *Essai sur les révolutions* and of the earlier-written parts of *Atala* may perhaps properly be called a Romantic; the author of the later-written parts of the latter work and of the *Génie du Christianisme* may perhaps properly be called a Romantic; but it is obvious that the word has, in most important respects, not merely different but antithetic senses in these two applications of it to the same person. Chateaubriand before 1799 represented in some sort the culmination of the naturalistic and primitivistic Romanticism of which Mr. Gosse sees the beginning in Joseph Warton; he had not only felt intensely but had even gratified the yearning to live 'with simple Indian swains.' That the Chateaubriand of 1801 represents just as clearly a revolt against this entire tendency is sufficiently evident from the repudiation of primitivism in the first preface to *Atala*:

Je ne suis point, comme M. Rousseau, un enthousiaste des sauvages; . . . je ne crois point que la *pure nature* soit la plus belle chose du monde. Je l'ai toujours trouvée fort laide partout où j'ai eu occasion de la voir . . . Avec ce mot de nature on a tout perdu.⁴⁸

Thus the magic word upon which the whole scheme of ideas of the earlier writing had depended is now plainly characterized as the fruitful source of error and confusion that it was. And in his views about the drama the Chateaubriand of 1801 was opposed *both* to the movement represented by *The Enthusiast* and to the German Romanticism of his own time. Shakespeare was (though mainly, as we have seen, for differing reasons) the idol of both; but Chateaubriand in his *Essai sur la littérature anglaise*⁴⁹ writes of Shakespeare in the vein, and partly in the words, of Voltaire and Pope. In point of natural genius, he grants, the English dramatist was without a peer in his own age, and perhaps in any age: 'je ne sais si jamais homme a jeté des regards plus profonds sur la nature humaine.' But Shakespeare knew almost nothing of the requirements of the drama as an art:

Il faut se persuader d'abord qu' écrire est un art; que cet art a nécessairement ses genres, et que chaque genre a ses règles. Et qu'on ne dise pas que les genres et les règles sont arbitraires; ils sont nés de la nature même; l'art a seulement séparé ce que la nature a confondu . . . On peut dire que Racine, dans toute l'excellence de son art, est plus naturel que Shakespeare.

Chateaubriand here, to be sure, still finds the standard of art in 'nature'; but it is 'nature' in the sense of the neo-classical critics, a sense in which it is not opposed, but equivalent, to an art that rigorously conforms to fixed rules. And the 'great literary paradox of the partisans of Shakespeare,' he observes, is that their arguments imply that 'there are no rules of the drama,' which is equivalent to asserting 'that an art is not an art.' Voltaire rightly felt that 'by banishing all rules and returning to *pure nature*, nothing was easier than to equal the *chefs-d'oeuvre* of the English stage'; and he was well advised in recanting his earlier too enthusiastic utterances about Shakespeare, since he saw that 'en relevant les beautés des barbares, il avait séduit des hommes qui, comme lui, ne sauraient séparer l'alliage de l'or.' Chateaubriand regrets that 'the *Cato* of Addison is no longer played' and that consequently 'on ne se délasse au théâtre anglais des monstruosités de Shakespeare que par les horreurs d'Otway.' 'Comment,' he exclaims, 'ne pas gémir de voir une nation éclairée, et qui compte parmi ses critiques les Pope et les Addison, de la voir s'extasier sur le portrait de l'apothicaire dans *Roméo et Juliette*. C'est le burlesque le plus hideux et le plus dégoûtant.' The entire passage might almost have been written with Warton's poem in mind, so completely and methodically does this later 'Romanticist' controvert the aesthetic principles and deride the enthusiasm of the English 'Romanticist' of 1740. It is worth noting, also, that Chateaubriand at this time thinks almost as ill of Gothic architecture as of Shakespeare and of *la pure nature*:

Une beauté dans Shakespeare n'excuse pas ses innombrables défauts: un monument gothique peut plaire par son obscurité et la difformité même de ses proportions, mais personne ne songe à bâtir un palais sur son modèle.⁵⁰

We have, then, observed and compared—very far from exhaustively, of course, yet in some of their most fundamental and determinative ideas—three 'Romanticisms.' In the first and second we have found certain common elements, but still more significant oppositions; in the second and third we have found certain other common elements, but likewise significant oppositions. But between the first and third the common elements are very scanty; such as there are, it could, I think, be shown, are not the same as those subsisting between either the first and second or the second and third; and in their ethical preconceptions and implications and the crucial articles of their literary creeds, the opposition between them is almost absolute.

All three of these historic episodes, it is true, are far more complex than I have time to show. I am attempting only to illustrate the nature of a certain procedure in the study of what is called Romanticism, to suggest its importance, and to present one or two specific results of the use of it. A complete analysis would qualify, without invalidating, these results, in several ways. It would (for one thing) bring out certain important connections between the revolt against the neo-classical aesthetics (common to two of the episodes mentioned) and other aspects of eighteenth-century thought. It would, again, exhibit fully certain *internal* oppositions in at least two of the Romanticisms considered. For example, in German Romanticism between 1797 and 1800 there grew up, and mainly from a single root, *both* an 'apotheosis of the future' and a tendency to retrospection—a retrospection directed, not, indeed, towards classical antiquity or towards the primitive, but towards the medieval. A belief in progress and a spirit of reaction were, paradoxically, joint offspring of the same idea, and were nurtured for a time in the same minds. But it is just these internal incongruities which make it most of all evident, as it seems to me, that any attempt at a *general* appraisal even of a single chronologically determinate Romanticism—still more, of 'Romanticism' as a whole—is a fatuity. When a Romanticism has been analyzed into the distinct 'strains' or ideas which compose it, the true philosophic affinities and the eventual practical influence in life and art of these several strains will usually be found to be exceedingly diverse and often conflicting. It will, no doubt, remain abstractly possible to raise the question whether the preponderant effect, moral or aesthetic, of one or another large movement which has been called by the name was good or bad. But that ambitious inquiry cannot even be legitimately begun until a prior task of analysis and detailed comparison—of the sort that I have attempted here to indicate—has been accomplished. And when this has been done, I doubt whether the larger question will seem to have much importance or meaning. What will then appear historically significant and philosophically instructive will be the way in which *each* of these distinguishable strains has worked itself out, what its elective affinities for other ideas, and its historic consequences, have shown themselves to be. The categories which it has become customary to use in distinguishing and classifying 'movements' in literature or philosophy and in describing the nature of the significant transitions which have taken place in taste and in opinion, are far too rough, crude, indiscriminating—and none of them so hopelessly so as the category 'Romantic.' It is not any large *complexes* of ideas, such as

that term has almost always been employed to designate, but rather certain simpler, diversely combinable, intellectual and emotional components of such complexes, that are the true elemental and dynamic factors in the history of thought and of art; and it is with the genesis, the vicissitudes, the manifold and often dramatic interactions of these, that it is the task of the historian of ideas in literature to become acquainted.

NOTES

1. *Le Romantisme français* (1919), 141 and *passim*.
2. *Jour. of Philosophy*, XIX (1922), 645.
3. *Egotism in German Philosophy*, 11-20, 54-64.
4. *Mme. Guyon et Fénelon précurseurs de Rousseau*, 1918.
5. 'Schiller and Romanticism,' *Mod. Lang. Notes*, XXXVII, 267 (1922), n. 28.
6. *Proc. Brit. Acad.*, 1915-16, 146-7.
7. *The Art of Poetry* (1923), 79-80.
8. *Contemporary Review*, April, 1919, p. 473.
9. *Classical and Romantic* (1923), 32, 31.
10. Editor's Introduction to *Essays in Romantic Literature* by George Wyndham, (1919), p. xxxiii.
11. *The Art of Poetry*, 79.
12. *Aspects and Impressions* (1922), 5.
13. *La Liquidation du Romantisme* (1919), 14 f.
14. *The Art of Poetry*, 50.
15. *The Architecture of Humanism* (1914), 39.
16. *P.M.L.A.*, XIII, 222.
17. Cf. George Boas in *Journal of Aesthetics*, I (1941), 52-65.
18. *The Drift of Romanticism* (1913), xiii, 247.
19. Marie Joachimi, *Die Weltanschauung der Romantik* (1905), 52.
20. Julius Bab, *Fortinbras, oder der Kampf des 19. Jahrhunderts mit dem Geiste der Romantik*.
21. G. Chatterton-Hill, *Contemporary Rev.* (1942), 720.
22. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, II (1941), 279 ff.
23. *Le mal romantique*, 1908, vii.
24. Cf. R. Gillouin, *Une nouvelle philosophie de l'histoire moderne et française*, 1921, 6 ff.; Seillière, *Le péril mystique*, etc., 2-6.
25. Wernaer, *Romanticism and the Romantic School in Germany*, p. 3.
26. Neilson, *Essentials of Poetry*, 1912, ch. III.
27. For the last mentioned, cf. Gosse in *Proc. Brit. Acad.*, 1915-16, 151.
28. *Le mal romantique*, xli.
29. 'Il y a même beaucoup de romantique dans la façon dont le combattent

certain traditionalistes imprudents, dont M. Lasserre paraît avoir quelquefois écouté les suggestions dangereuses' (*loc. cit.*).

30. *Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association*, VIII (1923).

31. *Le Catholicisme chez les Romantiques*, 1922.

32. 'Two Pioneers of Romanticism,' *Proc. Brit. Acad.*, 1915, pp. 146-8.

33. *Essays*, I, 31. There is a certain irony in the fact that the sort of naturalism here expressed by Montaigne was to be the basis of a Shakespeare-revival in the eighteenth century. For Shakespeare's own extreme antipathy to the passage is shown by the fact that he wrote two replies to it—a humorous one in *The Tempest*, a serious and profound one in *The Winter's Tale*.

34. This is not rhetorical exaggeration; more than sixty different senses or applications of the notion of 'nature' can be clearly distinguished.

35. So apparently Mr. Gosse: 'When the history of the [Romantic] school comes to be written, there will be a piquancy in tracing an antinomianism down from the blameless Warton to the hedonist essays of Oscar Wilde and the frenzied anarchism of the futurists' (*op. cit.*, 15.)

36. *Essays*, III, 12.

37. The title of the poem and some elements of its thought and feeling—especially its note of religious 'enthusiasm' for 'Nature' in the sense of the visible universe—are akin to, and probably derivative from, Shaftesbury's *Moralists*. But in Shaftesbury there is no opposition of 'nature' to 'art' and no antinomian strain, either ethical or aesthetic; 'decorum,' 'order,' 'balance,' and 'proportion' are among his favorite words.

38. Cf. my essay, 'The First Gothic Revival,' *etc.*

39. *Spectator*, No. 144.

40. Quotations in this paragraph from F. Schlegel are from *Athenaeum*, II, 1, p. 29; III, 1, p. 12; I, 2, p. 68; III, 1, p. 19. Those from A. W. Schlegel have already been cited by Marie Joachimi, *Weltanschauung der Romantik*, 179-183.

41. Cf. my essay on 'The Meaning of Romantic,' *etc.*

42. Review of Herder's *Humanitätsbriefe*; in Minor, *Fr. Schlegel*, 1794-1802.

43. Vorrede, *Die Griechen und Römer*, in Minor, *op. cit.*, I, 82.

44. *Vorschule der Aesthetik*, I, Programm V, § 23.

45. *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur*, 1809-11, in *Werke*, 1846, V, 16. Cf. also Novalis's *Hymnen an die Nacht*.

46. *Op. cit.*, V, 17.

47. *De l'Allemagne*, Pt. II, chap. XI.

48. On the two strains in *Atala*, cf. Chinard, *L'Exotisme américain dans l'œuvre de Chateaubriand*, 1918, ch. ix.

49. The section on Shakespeare was published in April, 1801 (*Mélanges politiques et littéraires*, 1854, pp. 390 ff.).

50. It is somewhat difficult to reconcile this with the eloquent passage on the Gothic church in the *Génie du Christianisme* (V, Ch. 8); yet even there, while ascribing to the Gothic style 'une beauté qui lui est particulière,' Chateaubriand also refers to its 'proportions barbares.'

The Structure of Romantic Nature Imagery

STUDENTS of romantic nature poetry have had a great deal to tell us about the philosophic components of this poetry: the specific blend of deistic theology, Newtonian physics, and pantheistic naturalism which pervades the Wordsworthian landscape in the period of 'Tintern Abbey,' the theism which sounds in the 'Eolian Harp' of Coleridge, the conflict between French atheism and Platonic idealism which even in 'Prometheus Unbound' Shelley was not able to resolve. We have been instructed in some of the more purely scientific coloring of the poetry—the images derived from geology, astronomy, and magnetism, and the coruscant green mystery which the electricians contributed to such phenomena as Shelley's Spirit of Earth. We have considered also the 'sensibility' of romantic readers, distinct, according to one persuasive interpretation, from that of neoclassic readers. What was exciting to the age of Pope, 'Puffs, Powders, Patches, Bibles, Billet-doux' (even about these the age might be loath to admit its excitement), was not, we are told, what was so manifestly exciting to the age of Wordsworth. 'High mountains are a feeling, but the hum of cities torture.' Lastly, recent critical history has reinvented attention to the romantic theory of imagination, and especially to the version of that theory which Coleridge derived from the German metaphysicians, the view of poetic imagination as the *esemplastic* power which reshapes our primary awareness of the world into symbolic avenues to the theological.¹

We have, in short, a *subject*—simply considered, the nature of birds and trees and streams— a *metaphysics* of an animating principle, a

From *The Verbal Icon* (The University Press of Kentucky, 1954), pp. 103-16. Reprinted by permission of the publisher and author.

special *sensibility*, and a *theory* of poetic imagination—the value of the last a matter of debate. Romantic poetry itself has recently suffered some disfavor among advanced critics. One interesting question, however, seems still to want discussion; that is, whether romantic poetry (or more specifically romantic nature poetry) exhibits any imaginative *structure* which may be considered a special counterpart of the subject, the philosophy, the sensibility, and the theory—and hence perhaps an explanation of the last. Something like an answer to such a question is what I would sketch.

For the purpose of providing an antithetic point of departure, I quote here a part of one of the best known and most toughly reasonable of all metaphysical images:

If they be two, they are two so
As stiff twin compasses are two,
Thy soul the fixed foot, makes no show
To move, but doth, if th' other do.

It will be relevant if we remark that this similitude, rather farfetched as some might think, is yet unmistakable to interpretation because quite overtly stated, but again is not, by being stated, precisely defined or limited in its poetic value. The kind of similarity and the kind of disparity that ordinarily obtain between a drawing compass and a pair of parting lovers are things to be attentively considered in reading this image. And the disparity between living lovers and stiff metal is not least important to the tone of precision, restraint, and conviction which it is the triumph of the poem to convey. Though the similitude is cast in the form of statement, its mood is actually a kind of subimperative. In the next age the tension of such a severe disparity was relaxed, yet the overtness and crispness of statement remained, and a wit of its own sort.

'Tis with our judgments as our watches, none
Go just alike, yet each believes his own.

We may take this as typical, I believe, of the metaphoric structure in which Pope achieves perfection and which survives a few years later in the couplets of Samuel Johnson or the more agile Churchill. The difference between our judgments and our watches, if noted at all, may be a pleasant epistemological joke for a person who questions the existence of a judgment which is taken out like a watch and consulted by another judgment.

But the 'sensibility,' as we know, had begun to shift even in the age of Pope. Examples of a new sensibility, and of a different structure, having something to do with Miltonic verse and a 'physico-theological nomenclature,' are to be found in Thomson's *Seasons*. Both a new sensibility and a new structure appear in the 'hamlets brown and dim-discovered spires' of Collins' early example of the full romantic dream. In several poets of the mid century, in the Wartons, in Grainger, or in Cunningham, one may feel, or rather see stated, a new sensibility, but at the same time one may lament an absence of poetic quality—that is, of a poetic structure adequate to embody or objectify the new feeling. It is as if these harbingers of another era had felt but had not felt strongly enough to work upon the objects of their feelings a pattern of meaning which would speak for itself—and which would hence endure as a poetic monument.

As a central exhibit I shall take two sonnets, that of William Lisle Bowles 'To the River Itchin' (1789)² and for contrast that of Coleridge 'To the River Otter' (1796)—written in confessed imitation of Bowles.³ Coleridge owed his first poetic inspiration to Bowles (the 'father' of English romantic poetry) and continued to express unlimited admiration for him as late as 1796. That is, they shared the same sensibility—as for that matter did Wordsworth and Southey, who too were deeply impressed by the sonnets of Bowles. As a schoolboy Coleridge read eagerly in Bowles' second edition of 1789⁴ (among other sonnets not much superior):

Itchin, when I behold thy banks again,
 Thy crumbling margin, and thy silver breast,
 On which the self-same tints still seem to rest,
 Why feels my heart the shiv'ring sense of pain?
 Is it—that many a summer's day has past
 Since, in life's morn, I carol'd on thy side?
 Is it—that oft, since then, my heart has sigh'd,
 As Youth, and Hope's delusive gleams, flew fast?
 Is it—that those, who circled on thy shore,
 Companions of my youth, now meet no more?
 Whate'er the cause, upon thy banks I bend
 Sorrowing, yet feel such solace at my heart,
 As at the meeting of some long-lost friend,
 From whom, in happier hours, we wept to part.

Here is an emotive expression which once appealed to the sensibility of its author and of his more cultivated contemporaries, but which has

with the lapse of time gone flat. The speaker was happy as a boy by the banks of the river. Age has brought disillusion and the dispersal of his friends. So a return to the river, in reminding him of the past, brings both sorrow and consolation. The facts are stated in four rhetorical questions and a concluding declaration. There is also something about how the river looks and how its looks might contribute to his feelings—in the metaphoric suggestion of the ‘crumbling’ margin and in the almost illusory tints on the surface of the stream which surprisingly have outlasted the ‘delusive gleams’ of his own hopes. Yet the total impression is one of simple association (by contiguity in time) simply asserted—what might be described in the theory of Hume or Hartley or what Hazlitt talks about in his essay ‘On the Love of the Country.’ ‘It is because natural objects have been associated with the sports of our childhood, . . . with our feelings in solitude . . . that we love them as we do ourselves.’

Coleridge himself in his ‘Lines Written at Elbingerode in 1799’ was to speak of a ‘spot with which the heart associates Holy remembrances of child or friend.’ His enthusiasm for Hartley in this period is well known. But later, in the *Biographia Literaria* and in the third of his essays on ‘Genial Criticism,’ he was to repudiate explicitly the Hartleyan and mechanistic way of shifting back burdens of meaning. And already, in 1796, Coleridge as poet was concerned with the more complex ontological grounds of association (the various levels of sameness, of correspondence and analogy), where mental activity transcends mere ‘associative response’—where it is in fact the unifying activity known both to later eighteenth century associationists and to romantic poets as ‘imagination.’ The ‘sweet and indissoluble union between the intellectual and the material world’ of which Coleridge speaks in the introduction to his pamphlet anthology of sonnets in 1796 must be applied by us in one sense to the sonnets of Bowles, but in another to the best romantic poetry and even to Coleridge’s imitation of Bowles. There is an important difference between the kinds of unity. In a letter to Sotheby of 1802 Coleridge was to say more emphatically: ‘The poet’s heart and intellect should be *combined*, intimately combined and unified with the great appearances of nature, and not merely held in solution and loose mixture with them.’⁶ In the same paragraph he says of Bowles’ later poetry: ‘Bowles has indeed the *sensibility* of a poet, but he has not the *passion* of a great poet . . . he has no native passion because he is not a thinker.’

The sententious melancholy of Bowles’ sonnets and the asserted connection between this mood and the appearances of nature are enough to explain the hold of the sonnets upon Coleridge. Doubtless the meta-

phoric coloring, faint but nonetheless real, which we have remarked in Bowles' descriptive details had also something to do with it. What is of great importance to note is that Coleridge's own sonnet 'To the River Otter' (while not a completely successful poem) shows a remarkable intensification of such color.

Dear native Brook! wild Streamlet of the West!
 How many various-fated years have past,
 What happy and what mournful hours, since last
 I skimmed the smooth thin stone along thy breast,
 Numbering its light leaps! yet so deep imprest
 Sink the sweet scenes of childhood, that mine eyes
 I never shut amid the sunny ray,
 But straight with all their tints thy waters rise,
 Thy crossing plank, thy marge with willows grey,
 And bedded sand that veined with various dyes
 Gleamed through thy bright transparence! On my way,
 Visions of Childhood! oft have ye beguiled
 Lone manhood's cares, yet waking fondest sighs:
 Ah! that once more I were a careless Child!

Almost the same statement as that of Bowles' sonnet—the sweet scenes of childhood by the river have only to be remembered to bring both beguilement and melancholy. One notices immediately, however, that the speaker has kept his eye more closely on the object. There are more details. The picture is more vivid, a fact which according to one school of poetics would in itself make the sonnet superior. But a more analytic theory will find it worth remarking also that certain ideas, latent or involved in the description, have much to do with its vividness. As a child, careless and free, wild like the streamlet, the speaker amused himself with one of the most carefree motions of youth—skimming smooth thin stones which leapt lightly on the breast of the water. One might have thought such experiences would sink no deeper in the child's breast than the stones in the water—'yet so deep imprest'—the very antithesis (though it refers overtly only to the many hours which have intervened) defines imaginatively the depth of the impressions. When he closes his eyes, they *rise* again (the word *rise* may be taken as a trope which hints the whole unstated similitude); they rise like the tinted waters of the stream; they gleam up through the depths of memory—the 'various-fated years'—like the 'various dyes' which vein the sand of the river bed. In short, there is a rich ground of meaning in Coleridge's sonnet beyond

what is overtly stated. The descriptive details of his sonnet gleam brightly because (consciously or unconsciously—it would be fruitless to inquire how deliberately he wrote these meanings into his lines) he has invested them with significance. Here is a special perception, 'invention' if one prefers, 'imagination,' or even 'wit.' It can be explored and tested by the wit of the reader. In this way it differs from the mere flat announcement of a Hartleian association, which is not open to challenge and hence not susceptible of confirmation. If this romantic wit differs from that of the metaphysicals, it differs for one thing in making less use of the central overt statement of similitude which is so important in all rhetoric stemming from Aristotle and the Renaissance. The metaphor in fact is scarcely noticed by the main statement of the poem.⁶ Both tenor and vehicle, furthermore, are wrought in a parallel process out of the same material. The river landscape is both the occasion of reminiscence and the source of the metaphors by which reminiscence is described.⁷ A poem of this structure is a signal instance of that kind of fallacy (or strategy) by which death in poetry occurs so often in winter or at night, and sweethearts meet in the spring countryside. The tenor of such a similitude is likely to be subjective—reminiscence or sorrow or beguilement—not an object distinct from the vehicle, as lovers or their souls are distinct from twin compasses. Hence the emphasis of Bowles, Coleridge, and all other romantics on spontaneous feelings and sincerity. Hence the recurrent themes of One Being and Eolian Influence and Wordsworth's 'ennobling interchange of action from within and from without.' In such a structure again the element of tension in disparity is not so important as for metaphysical wit. The interest derives not from our being aware of disparity where likeness is firmly insisted on, but in an opposite activity of discerning the design which is latent in the multifarious sensuous picture.

Let us notice for a moment the 'crossing plank' of Coleridge's sonnet, a minor symbol in the poem, a sign of shadowy presences, the lads who had once been there. The technique of this symbol is the same as that which Keats was to employ in a far more brilliant romantic instance, the second stanza of his 'Ode to Autumn,' where the very seasonal spirit is conjured into reality out of such haunted spots—in which a gesture lingers—the half-reaped furrow, the oozing cider press, the brook where the gleaners have crossed with laden heads.⁸ To return to our metaphysics—of an animate, plastic Nature, not transcending but immanent in and breathing through all things—and to discount for the moment such differences as may relate to Wordsworth's naturalism, Coleridge's

theology, Shelley's Platonism, or Blake's visions: we may observe that the common feat of the romantic nature poets was to read meanings into the landscape. 'A puddle,' says Hazlitt, 'is filled with preternatural faces.'⁹ The meaning might be such as we have seen in Coleridge's sonnet, but it might more characteristically be more profound, concerning the spirit or soul of things—'the one life within us and abroad.' And that meaning especially was summoned out of the very surface of nature itself. It was embodied imaginatively and without the explicit religious or philosophic statements which one will find in classical or Christian instances—for example in Pope's 'Essay on Man':

Here then we rest: 'The Universal Cause
Acts to one end, but acts by various laws,'

or in the teleological divines, More, Cudworth, Bentley, and others of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, or in Paley during the same era as the romantics. The romantic poets want to have it and not have it too—a spirit which the poet himself as superidealist creates by his own higher reason or esemplastic imagination. Here one may recall Ruskin's chapter of *Modern Painters* on the difference between the Greek gods of rivers and trees and the vaguer suffusions of the romantic vista—'the curious web of hesitating sentiment, pathetic fallacy, and wandering fancy, which form a great part of our modern view of nature.' Wordsworth's 'Prelude,' from the cliff that 'upreared its head' in the night above Ullswater to the 'blue chasm' that was the 'soul' of the moonlit cloudscape beneath his feet on Snowdon, is the archpoet's testament, both theory and demonstration of this way of reading nature. His 'Tintern Abbey' is another classic instance, a whole pantheistic poem woven of the landscape, where God is not once mentioned. After the 'soft inland murmur,' the 'one green hue,' the 'wreaths of smoke . . . as . . . Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods' (always something just out of sight or beyond definition), it is an easy leap to the 'still, sad music of humanity,' and

a sense sublime
Of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns.

This poem, written as Wordsworth revisited the banks of a familiar stream, the 'Sylvan Wye,' is the full realization of a poem for which Coleridge and Bowles had drawn slight sketches. In Shelley's 'Hymn to Intellectual Beauty' the 'awful shadow' of the 'unseen Power' is sub-

stantiated of 'moonbeam' showers of light behind the 'piny mountain,' of 'mist o'er mountains driven.' On the Lake of Geneva in the summer of 1816 Byron, with Shelley the evangelist of Wordsworth at his side, spoke of 'a living fragrance from the shore,' a 'floating whisper on the hill.' We remark in each of these examples a dramatization of the spiritual through the use of the faint, the shifting, the least tangible and most mysterious parts of nature—a poetic counterpart of the several theories of spirit as subtle matter current in the eighteenth century, Newton's 'electric and elastic' active principle, Hartley's 'infinitesimal elementary body.' The application of this philosophy to poetry by way of direct statement had been made as early as 1735 in Henry Brooke's 'Universal Beauty,' where an 'elastick Flue of fluctuating Air' pervades the universe as 'animating Soul.' In the high romantic period the most scientific version to appear in poetry was the now well recognized imagery which Shelley drew from the electricians.

In such a view of spirituality the landscape itself is kept in focus as a literal object of attention. Without it Wordsworth and Byron in the examples just cited would not get a start. And one effect of such a use of natural imagery—an effect implicit in the very philosophy of a World Spirit—is a tendency in the landscape imagery to a curious split. If we have not only the landscape but the spirit which either informs or visits it, and if both of these must be rendered for the sensible imagination, a certain parceling of the landscape may be the result. The most curious illustrations which I know are in two of Blake's early quartet of poems to the seasons. Thus, 'To Spring':

O THOU with dewy locks, who lookest down
Thro' the clear windows of the morning, turn
Thine angel eyes upon our western isle,
Which in full choir hails thy approach, O Spring!

The hills tell each other, and the list'ning
Vallies hear; all our longing eyes are turned
Up to thy bright pavillions; issue forth,
And let thy holy feet visit our clime.

Come o'er the eastern hills, and let our winds
Kiss thy perfumed garments; let us taste
Thy morn and evening breath; scatter thy pearls
Upon our love-sick land that mourns for thee.

And 'To Summer':

THE STRUCTURE OF ROMANTIC NATURE IMAGERY

O THOU, who passest thro' our vallies in
Thy strength, curb thy fierce steeds, allay the heat
That flames from their large nostrils! thou, O Summer,
Oft pitched'st here thy golden tent, and oft
Beneath our oaks hast slept, while we beheld
With joy thy ruddy limbs and flourishing hair.

Beneath our thickest shades we oft have heard
Thy voice, when noon upon his fervid car
Rode o'er the deep of heaven; beside our springs
Sit down, and in our mossy vallies, on
Some bank beside a river clear, throw thy
Silk draperies off, and rush into the stream.

Blake's starting point, it is true, is the opposite of Wordsworth's or Byron's, not the landscape but a spirit personified or allegorized. Nevertheless, this spirit as it approaches the 'western isle' takes on certain distinctly terrestrial hues. Spring, an oriental bridegroom, lives behind the 'clear windows of the morning' and is invited to issue from 'bright pavillions,' doubtless the sky at dawn. He has 'perfumed garments' which when kissed by the winds will smell much like the flowers and leaves of the season. At the same time, his *own* morn and evening breaths are most convincing in their likeness to morning and evening breezes. The pearls scattered by the hand of Spring are, we must suppose, no other than the flowers and buds which literally appear in the landscape at this season. They function as landscape details and simultaneously as properties of the bridegroom and—we note here a further complication—as properties of the land taken as lovesick maiden. We have in fact a double personification conjured from one nature, one landscape, in a wedding which approximates fusion. Even more curious is the case of King Summer, a divided tyrant and victim, who first appears as the source and spirit of heat, his steeds with flaming nostrils, his limbs ruddy, his tent golden, but who arrives in our valleys only to sleep in the shade of the oaks and be invited to rush into the river for a swim. These early romantic poems are examples of the Biblical, classical, and Renaissance tradition of allegory as it approaches the romantic condition of landscape naturalism—as Spring and Summer descend into the landscape and are fused with it. Shelley's *Alastor* is a spirit of this kind, making the 'wild his home,' a spectral 'Spirit of wind,' expiring 'Like some frail exhalation; which the dawn Robes in its golden beams.' Byron's *Childe Harold* desired that he himself might become a 'portion' of that around him, of the tempest and the night. 'Be thou,

Spirit fierce,' said Shelley to the West Wind, 'My spirit! Be thou me.'

An English student of the arts in the Jacobean era, Henry Peacham, wrote a book on painting in which he gave allegorical prescriptions for representing the months, quoted under the names of months by Dr. Johnson in his *Dictionary*:

April is represented by a young man in green, with a garland of myrtle and hawthorn buds; in one hand primroses and violets, in the other the sign Taurus.

July I would have drawn in a jacket of light yellow, eating cherries, with his face and bosom sunburnt.¹⁰

But that would have been the end of it. April would not have been painted into a puzzle picture where hawthorn buds and primroses were arranged to shadow forth the form of a person.¹¹ There were probably deep enough reasons why the latter nineteenth century went so far in the development of so trivial a thing as the actual landscape puzzle picture.

In his Preface of 1815 Wordsworth spoke of the *abstracting* and *'modifying powers of the imagination.'* He gave as example a passage from his own poem, 'Resolution and Independence,' where an old leech gatherer is likened to a stone which in turn is likened to a sea beast crawled forth to sun itself. The poems which we have just considered, those of Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Blake especially, with their blurring of literal and figurative, might also be taken, I believe, as excellent examples. In another of his best poems Wordsworth produced an image which shows so strange yet artistic a warping, or modification, of vehicle by tenor that, though not strictly a nature image, it may be quoted here with close relevance. In the ode 'Intimations of Immortality':

Hence, in a season of calm weather,
Though inland far we be,
Our souls have sight of that immortal sea
Which brought us hither;
Can in a moment travel thither—
And see the children sport upon the shore,
And hear the mighty waters rolling evermore.

Or, as one might drably paraphrase, our souls in a calm mood look back to the infinity from which they came, as persons inland on clear days can look back to the sea by which they have voyaged to the land.

The tenor concerns souls and age and time. The vehicle concerns travelers and space. The question for the analyst of structure is: Why are the children found on the seashore? In what way do they add to the solemnity or mystery of the sea? Or do they at all? The answer is that they are not strictly parts of the traveler-space vehicle, but of the soul-age-time tenor, attracted over, from tenor to vehicle. The travelers looking back in both space and time see themselves as children on the shore, as if just born like Venus from the foam. This is a sleight of words, an imposition of image upon image, by the *modifying* power of imagination.

Poetic structure is always a fusion of ideas with material, a statement in which the solidity of symbol and the sensory verbal qualities are somehow not washed out by the abstraction. For this effect the iconic or directly imitative powers of language are important—and of these the well known onomatopoeia or imitation of sound is only one, and one of the simplest. The 'stiff twin compasses' of Donne have a kind of iconicity in the very stiffness and odd emphasis of the metrical situation. Neoclassic iconicity is on the whole of a highly ordered, formal, or intellectual sort, that of the 'figures of speech' such as antithesis, isocolon, homoeoteleuton, or chiasmus. But romantic nature poetry tends to achieve iconicity by a more direct sensory imitation of something headlong and impassioned, less ordered, nearer perhaps to the subrational. Thus: in Shelley's 'Ode to the West Wind' the shifts in imagery of the second stanza, the pell-mell raggedness and confusion of loose clouds, decaying leaves, angels and Maenads with hair uplifted, the dirge, the dome, the vapors, and the enjambment from tercet to tercet combine to give an impression beyond statement of the very wildness, the breath and power which is the vehicle of the poem's radical metaphor. If we think of a scale of structures having at one end logic, the completely reasoned and abstracted, and at the other some form of madness or surrealism, matter or impression unformed and undisciplined (the imitation of disorder by the idiom of disorder), we may see metaphysical and neoclassical poetry as near the extreme of logic (though by no means reduced to that status) and romantic poetry as a step toward the directness of sensory presentation (though by no means sunk into subrationality). As a structure which favors implication rather than overt statement, the romantic is far closer than the metaphysical to symbolist poetry and the varieties of postsymbolist most in vogue today. Both types of structure, the metaphysical and the romantic, are valid. Each has gorgeously enriched the history of English poetry.

NOTES

1. This paragraph alludes especially to Joseph Warren Beach, *The Concept of Nature in Nineteenth-Century English Poetry* (New York, 1936), chaps. II-VIII; Newton P. Stallknecht, *Strange Seas of Thought* (Durham, 1945), chaps. II-III; Carl H. Grabo, *A Newton among Poets* (Chapel Hill, 1930), chaps. VI-VII, and *Prometheus Unbound: An Interpretation* (Chapel Hill, 1935), 142-43, 151; Frederick A. Pottle, *The Idiom of Poetry* (Ithaca, 1941), chap. I. For a survey of recent writing on the English romantic theory of imagination, see Thomas M. Raysor (ed.), *The English Romantic Poets, A Review of Research* (New York, 1950).

2. The sonnet 'To the River Lodon' (1777) by Bowles' Oxford senior, Thomas Warton, shows sensibility with even less structural support.

3. Coleridge's sonnet first appears in its entirety and as a separate poem in the pamphlet collection which he published privately in 1796; the sonnet reappears in the 1797 *Poems* of Coleridge under the half-title 'Sonnet attempted in the manner of the Rev. W. L. Bowles.'

4. 'I made, within less than a year and a half, more than forty transcriptions, as the best presents I could offer.' *Biographia Literaria*, chap. I.

5. Coleridge has in mind such loose resemblances as need to be stated 'in the shape of formal similes.' *Letters* (Boston, 1895), I, 404. Cp. Bowles, *Sonnets* (2d ed., Bath, 1789), Sonnet V, 'To the River Wenbeck,' 'I listen to the wind, And think I hear meek sorrow's plaint'; Sonnet VI, 'To the River Tweed,' 'The murmurs of thy wand'ring wave below Seem to his ear the pity of a friend.'

6. See the more overt connections in the poem 'Recollection' (*Watchman*, no. V, April 2, 1796) from which lines 2-11 of this sonnet were taken. 'Where blameless Pleasures dimpled Quiet's cheek, As water-lilies ripple thy slow stream!' 'Ah! fair tho' faint those forms of memory seem, Like Heaven's bright bow on thy smooth evening stream.'

7. 'It is among the chief excellencies of Bowles that his imagery appears almost always prompted by surrounding scenery.' Coleridge to Southey, December 17, 1794 (*Letters*, I, 115).

8. Compare the 'wooden bridge' in Arnold's Keatsian 'Scholar Gypsy.'

9. 'On Mr. Wordsworth's *Excursion*.'

10. With these prescriptions compare the allegorical panels of seasons and months in Spencer's *Cantos of Mutabilitie*, VII, xxviii ff.

11. Perhaps too sweeping. See, for instance, Alfred H. Barr, Jr. (ed.), *Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism* (New York, 1947), 83, 'Head-Landscape' in the tradition of Arcimboldo.

The Correspondent Breeze: A Romantic Metaphor

Writing in 1834, Henry Taylor noted that Wordsworth's attacks on eighteenth-century diction had succeeded in making poetry, in some particulars, more plain spoken. But Taylor also remarked that in effect a new poetic diction had covertly replaced the old. If Romantic poets no longer refer to the nightingale by the Greek name, Philomel, some of them refer to it by the Persian name, Bulbul; Taylor cites one reader who said 'he had learnt, for the first time, from Lord Byron's poetry, that two bulls make a nightingale.' Worse still are the stock terms scattered through poetry 'with a sort of feeling senselessness,' such as 'wild,' 'bright,' 'lonely,' and 'dream,' and especially the variant forms of the word 'breathing'; 'to breathe,' Taylor says, has become 'a verb poetical which [means] anything but respiration.'¹

To this shrewd observation I would add that 'breathing' is only one aspect of a more general component in Romantic poetry. This is air-in-motion, whether it occurs as breeze or breath, wind or respiration—whether the air is compelled into motion by natural forces or by the action of the human lungs. That the poetry of Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley, Byron should be so thoroughly ventilated is itself noteworthy; but the surprising thing is how often, in the major poems, the wind is not only a property of the landscape, but also a vehicle for radical changes in the poet's mind. The rising wind, usually linked with the outer transition from winter to spring, is correlated with a complex subjective process: the return to a sense of community after isolation,

the renewal of life and emotional vigor after apathy and a deathlike torpor, and an outburst of creative power following a period of imaginative sterility.

Coleridge's *Dejection: An Ode*, written in 1802, provides the earliest inclusive instance of this symbolic equation. The poetic meditation is set in April, which turns out, as in Eliot's *Waste Land*, to be the cruelest month because, in breeding life out of the dead land, it painfully revives emotional life in the observer, mixing memory and desire. And as the poem opens, a desultory breeze makes itself audible on a wind-harp—an instrument whose eerie modulations sound through most of the writings with which we are concerned.

James Bowyer, Coleridge's schoolmaster and pre-Wordsworthian reformer of poetic diction, had vigorously proscribed the traditional lyre as an emblem for poetizing. 'Harp? Harp? Lyre? Pen and ink, boy, you mean!' ² But by the process already noted—we might call it Taylor's principle—the lyre of Apollo was often replaced in Romantic poetry by the Aeolian lyre, whose music is evoked not by art, human or divine, but by a force of nature. Poetic man, in a statement by Shelley which had close parallels in Coleridge and Wordsworth, is an instrument subject to impressions 'like the alterations of an ever-changing wind over an Aeolian lyre, which move it by their motion to ever-changing melody.' ³ The wind-harp has become a persistent Romantic analogue of the poetic mind, the figurative mediator between outer motion and inner emotion. It is possible to speculate that, without this plaything of the eighteenth century, the Romantic poets would have lacked a conceptual model for the way the mind and imagination respond to the wind, so that some of their most characteristic passages might have been, in a literal sense, inconceivable.

In Coleridge's *Dejection* the moaning wind-harp foretells a storm which the lyric speaker in his lethargy awaits in the hope that, as in the past, it may send 'my soul abroad' and release the

stified, drowsy, unimpassioned grief,
Which finds no natural outlet, no relief . . .

The speaker reviews the afflictions that have made him take refuge in 'abstruse research,' and have destroyed his inner joy and any possibility of emotional commerce with the outer scene. Worst of all is the attendant paralysis of his poetic power, the 'shaping spirit of Imagination.' But even as the speaker inventories the conditions of his death in life,

the outer wind mounts to a storm of driving rain and compels the wind-harp into loud and violent music. In implicit parallel with the wind-harp, the poet also responds to the storm with mounting vitality—what he calls ‘the passion and the life, whose fountains are within,’ once more break out—until, in a lull of the wind, the poem rounds on itself and ends where it began, with a calm both of nature and of mind. But the poet has moved from the calm of apathy to one of peace after passion. By the agency of the wind storm it describes, the poem turns out to contradict its own premises: the poet’s spirit awakens to violent life even as he laments his inner death, achieves release in the despair at being cut off from all outlet, and demonstrates the power of imagination in the process of memorializing its failure.

That the poem was grounded in experience is evident from Coleridge’s many letters testifying to his delight in wind and storms, which he watched ‘with a total feeling worshipping the power and “eternal Link” of Energy,’ and through which he had walked, ‘stricken . . . with barrenness’ in a ‘deeper dejection than I am willing to remember,’ seeking the inspiration for completing *Christabel*.⁴ In one passage, written some nine months after he had completed *Dejection*, we find a symbolic wind again involving the revival of feeling and imagination, and leading to the sense of the one life within us and abroad:

In simple earnest, I never find myself alone within the embracement of rocks and hills, a traveller up an alpine road, but my spirit courses, drives, and eddies, like a Leaf in Autumn: a wild activity, of thoughts, imagination, feelings, and impulses of motion, rises up from within me—a sort of *bottom-wind*, that blows to no point of the compass, and comes from I know not whence, but agitates the whole of me. . . . Life seems to me then a universal spirit, that neither has, nor can have, an opposite. . . . where is there *room* for death?⁵

Similarly with Coleridge’s friend, Wordsworth: ‘Winter winds,’ Dorothy wrote, ‘are his delight—his mind I think is often more fertile in this season than any other.’⁶ Of this phenomenon Wordsworth himself gave remarkable testimony in the autobiographical *Prelude*. From the beginning of this work, in fact, the recurrent wind serves unobtrusively as a leitmotif, representing the chief theme of continuity and interchange between outer motions and the interior life and powers, and providing the poem with a principle of organization beyond chronology.

Earlier poets had launched their epics by invoking for inspiration a

Muse, Apollo, or the Holy Spirit. Wordsworth's opening lines, which have an identical function, are:

Oh there is blessing in this gentle breeze
That blows from the green fields and from the clouds
And from the sky

Released at last from the city and the oppressive weight of the past, the poet says 'I breathe again'; but so, we find, is nature breathing, in a passage where the wind becomes both the stimulus and outer correspondent to a spring-like revival of the spirit after a wintry season, and also to a revival of poetic inspiration which Wordsworth, going beyond Coleridge, equates with the inspiration of the Prophets when touched by the Holy Spirit. There is even a glancing metaphoric parallel between the resulting poetic creation and the prototypal creation by divine utterance—For 'Nature's self,' as Wordsworth said later, 'is the breath of God' (*Prelude*, 1805 ed., V, 222.)

For I, methought, while the sweet breath of Heaven
Was blowing on my body, felt within
A corresponding mild creative breeze,
A vital breeze which travell'd gently on
O'er things which it had made, and is become
A tempest, a redundant energy
Vexing its own creation. 'Tis a power
That does not come unrecogniz'd, a storm
Which, breaking up a long-continued frost
Brings with it vernal promises . . .
The holy life of music and of verse

To the open fields I told
A prophecy: poetic numbers came
Spontaneously, and cloth'd in priestly robe
My spirit, thus singled out, as it might seem,
For holy services. . . .

And a bit farther on comes the remaining element of the Romantic complex, the analogy between poetic mind and Aeolian harp:

It was a splendid evening; and my soul
Did once again make trial of the strength
Restored to her afresh; nor did she want
Eolian visitations; but the harp
Was soon defrauded. . . . (1805 ed., I, 1-105)

Later Wordsworth parallels Milton's reinvocations of his divine guides by recalling the 'animating breeze' which had made a 'glad preamble to this Verse,' and now, made visible by the tossing boughs of his favorite grove, once again

Spreads through me a commotion like its own,
Something that fits me for the Poet's task. (VII, 1-56)

Wordsworth's account of his mental breakdown in *The Prelude* runs broadly parallel to the autobiographical passages in Coleridge's *Dejection*. And at the nadir of his apathy, when he felt 'utter loss of hope itself, And things to hope for,' Wordsworth signaled his recovery by addressing again the correspondent breeze:

Not with these began
Our Song, and not with these our Song must end:
Ye motions of delight, that through the fields
Stir gently, breezes and soft airs that breathe
The breath of Paradise, and find your way
To the recesses of the soul (XI, 7-12)

'Spring returns, I saw the Spring return'; and even the influence of Dorothy is apprehended as a revivifying spring breeze—

Thy breath,
Dear Sister, was a kind of gentler spring
That went before my steps. (XII, 23-4; XIII, 244-6)

Time and again Wordsworth's most arcane statements similarly involve, as he put it in *The Excursion* (IV, 600), 'the breeze of nature stirring in his soul.'⁷ In the *Intimations Ode*, 'The winds come to me from the fields of sleep'; and in *The Prelude*, the poet listens to sounds that

make their dim abode in distant winds.
Thence did I drink the visionary power;

or asserts that

visionary power
Attends the motions of the viewless winds,
Embodied in the mystery of words.

The shell of the Arab, in Wordsworth's dream, which utters 'A loud prophetic blast of harmony,'

Had voices more than all the winds, with power
To exhilarate the spirit. . . . (1850 ed., II, 310-11;
V, 595-7; 92-108)

Of the two 'spots of time'—the indelible memories by which his imagination, having, like Coleridge's, been 'impaired,' was 'nourished and invisible repaired'—one incorporated a woman with 'her garments vexed and tossed By the strong wind,' and the other 'the wind and sleety rain' evoking 'the bleak music of that old stone wall.' The result is that to this very time, whether in winter storm and rain or when the summer trees rock

In a strong wind, some working of the spirit,
Some inward agitations thence are brought. . . .
(1850 ed., XII, 208-332)

Wordsworth read his completed masterpiece to Coleridge in 1807, five years after the writing of *Dejection*, and when Coleridge's spirits were at their lowest ebb. In his memorial on that occasion "To William Wordsworth," Coleridge duly noted that Wordsworth had described the quickening effect within his mind of the springtime wind: of 'vital breathings secret as the soul of vernal growth.' Then, as he listened to those passages in which Wordsworth expressed his love and hope for Coleridge himself, suddenly the poet's solemn voice seized upon his friend as though it were itself a great wind which, like the literal storm in *Dejection*, fanned his torpid spirit, 'whose hope had seem'd to die,' into a momentary and painful rebirth. The episode is one of the most moving in literature.

The storm
Scatter'd and whirl'd me, till my thoughts became
A bodily tumult. . . .
Ah! as I listened with a heart forlorn,
The pulses of my being beat anew:
And even as Life returns upon the drowned,
Life's joy rekindling roused a throng of pains—
Keen pangs of Love, awakening as a babe
Turbulent, with an outcry in the heart. . . .⁸

It is easy to multiply similar quotations, from these and other Romantic writers. Childe Harold, for example, found his spirit participating in the violence of an Alpine tempest, and drew a parallel with the violent

explosion of his mind in poetry (Canto III, xcii-vii). And while De Quincey, a child of six, stood secretly and alone by the deathbed of a beloved sister, 'a solemn wind began to blow'; as his 'ear caught this vast Aeolian intonation' and his eye turned from 'the golden fulness of life' outdoors in the midsummer noon to settle 'upon the frost which overspread my sister's face, instantly a trance fell upon me. . . . I, in spirit, rose as if on billows. . . .'⁹

One poet, the most visionary and vatic of all these, demands special attention. Shelley's best known poem is addressed directly to the wind, in the form of a sustained invocation and petition. In the opening stanzas the Wild West Wind is at once destroyer and preserver because in the autumn it tears down the dead leaves and the seeds, but only so that in a later season another west wind—'thine azure sister of the spring'—may blow the clarion of resurrection, revive the seeds, and call out the buds to feed, like flocks of sheep, on the moving air, the wind itself. In the last stanza Shelley, like Coleridge in *Dejection*, cries out to the wind, in the autumn of his spirit, to blow through him as through a wind-harp—'Make me thy lyre, even as the forest is'—and to drive the withered leaves of his dead thoughts over the universe 'to quicken a new birth.' And in the coda, to the blast of the wind sounding this time the apocalyptic trumpet of the general destruction and resurrection, the immense analogy is consummated between the effect of the wind on the unawakened earth, the singer's inspiration to poetry and prophecy, and the springtime of the human spirit everywhere.

Be thou, Spirit fierce,
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one! . . .
Be through my lips to unawakened earth
The trumpet of a prophecy! O, Wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?

Elsewhere the wind served Shelley repeatedly as a stimulus and symbol of inspiration, in his prose essays as well as his verse. *Alastor* opens with an invocation to the 'Mother of this unfathomable world!'

Serenely now
And moveless, as a long-forgotten lyre. . .
I wait thy breath, Great Parent, that my strain
May modulate with murmurs of the air. . . .¹⁰

Shelley's use of the wind in *Adonais* is of particular interest. This poem follows the classic elegiac pattern—consonant also with the evolution

of earlier Romantic poems of dejection—from despair to consolation; although Shelley's consolation involves a death wish:

Die,
If thou wouldst be with that which thou dost seek! . . .
Why linger, why turn back, why shrink, my Heart?

The conclusion, however, is astonishing. Most of these poems begin with a literal wind which transforms itself into the metaphorical wind of inspiration. Shelley reverses the sequence. At the end of *Adonais* the inspiration he had evoked 'in song' (that is, in his *Ode to the West Wind*) actually descends upon him; and what he feels is a tangible breath which rises to the violence of a literal storm of wind:

The breath whose might I have invoked in song
Descends on me; my spirit's bark is driven,
Far from the shore, far from the trembling throng
Whose sails were never to the tempest given;
The massy earth and spherèd skies are riven!
I am borne darkly, fearfully, afar¹¹

II

Taken singly the symbolic equations between breeze, breath, and soul, respiration and inspiration, the reanimation of nature and of the spirit, are not peculiarly Romantic, nor in any way recent. All are older than recorded history; they are inherent in the constitution of ancient languages, are widely current in myth and folklore, and make up some of the great commonplaces of our religious tradition.

When Shelley, for example, made the West Wind the breath of autumn's being and a spirit, which became his breath and his spirit and blew, through him, the trumpet prophesying a universal resurrection, he may seem radically innovative. But from a philological point of view Shelley was reactionary; he merely revived and exploited the ancient undivided meanings of these words. For the Latin *spiritus* signified wind and breath, as well as soul. So did the Latin *anima*, and the Greek *pneuma*, the Hebrew *ruach*, the Sanskrit *atman*, as well as the equivalent words in Arabic, Japanese, and many other languages, some of them totally unrelated. In myth and religion, moreover, wind and breath often play an essential part in the creation both of the universe and of man.

In the beginning the spirit, or breath, or wind (*ruach*) of God moved upon the face of the waters; and after forming man, God 'breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.' Even in the Old Testament breath and wind were given the added power of renewing life after death, as in Ezekiel 37:9: 'Prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind . . . "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live."' Similarly Jesus said (John 3:7-8): 'Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. The wind bloweth where it listeth . . . so is every one that is born of the Spirit.' But God's breath in the Bible could also be a destroying storm (as in I Kings 19:11; Ezekiel 13:13), symbolizing the explosion of God's wrath as well as the gift of life or grace. In parallel fashion the Wind Gods of Greek and Roman myth were regarded as destructive, requiring propitiation; but they also—especially the West Wind, 'Zephyrus,' or 'Favonius'—were held to possess an animating or impregnating power, a fact noted by medieval encyclopedists, and by Chaucer:

Whan Zephyrus eek with his swete breeth
 Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
 The tendre croppes. . . .

Shelley thus had ample precedent, pagan and Christian, for his West Wind, both breath and spirit, destroyer as well as preserver, which is equally the revitalizing Zephyrus of the Romans and the trumpet blast of the Book of Revelation, announcing the simultaneous destruction of the present world and a new life in a world recreated. The additional connection between wind and inspiration is, of course, implicit in the latter term, for 'to inspire' once meant 'to blow or breathe into,' and when a man received the divine 'afflatus' he received, literally, the breath or wind of a god or muse. According to classical belief, this supernatural breath stimulated the visionary utterances of religious oracles and prophetic poets. Eliphaz the Temanite, in the Book of Job (4:13-16), expressed a similar view: 'In thoughts from the visions of the night . . . a spirit [or breeze: *ruach*] passed before my face. . . . There was silence, and I heard a voice.' And on the day of Pentecost, in the Acts of the New Testament (2:1-4), 'suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind. . . . And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.'

One other historical item is pertinent. The Stoic concept of the World Soul—of the Pneuma, or Spiritus Sacer, or Anima Mundi—originally in-

volved, in the literal sense of these names, the concept of a kind of breath, a divine gas, which infuses the material world and constitutes also the individual human psyche. The poet Lucan said that Apollo founded the Delphic oracle at a huge chasm where 'the earth breathed forth divine truth, and . . . gave out a wind that spoke'; and he suggested that the Pythian priestess stationed there is inspired by inhaling the very breath of the World Soul.¹² It is noteworthy that the familiar Romantic Soul of Nature, or Spirit of the Universe, sometimes retained its primitive airy essence, homogeneous with the soul of man, as well as its power of quasi-literal inspiration. In *The Eolian Harp* Coleridge speculated that all animated nature may be but organic wind harps, diversely framed, through which sweeps 'one intellectual breeze, At once the Soul of each, and God of all.' Wordsworth in *The Prelude* invoked the 'Wisdom,' 'Spirit,' and 'Soul' of the Universe,

That givest to forms and images a breath
And everlasting motion,

and also the 'Soul of things,' that in its love renews

Those naked feelings, which, when thou would'st form
A living thing, thou sendest like a breeze
Into its infant being!¹³

Shelley called upon the West Wind, the 'breath of Autumn's being,' to blow through him: 'Be thou, spirit fierce, My spirit!' The Soul of the worlds, Emerson later declared in 'The Over-Soul,' 'can inspire whom it will, and behold! their speech shall by lyrical and sweet, and universal as the rising of the wind.'

III

In the Biblical commentaries of the Church Fathers it was commonly recognized that the moving air, the breath of the Lord, the Holy Spirit, the life and spiritual rebirth of man, and the inspiration of the Prophets in the Old and New Testaments were connected, if not literally, then allegorically, or by a system of correspondence, or by some other exegetical relation. Before the end of the fourth century, Saint Augustine had imported the spiritual breeze into the context of autobiography that is common to all the Romantic writings I have cited. In the central passage of his *Confessions* (VIII, xi-xii), Augustine described his tortured state

as he hesitated at the brink of conversion, 'soul-sick . . . and tormented,' as he said, 'hesitating to die to death and live to life.' Then one day he retired into the garden next his lodging, and 'when a deep consideration had from the secret bottom of my soul drawn together and heaped up all my misery in my heart, there arose a mighty wind, bringing a mighty shower of tears'; with the result that 'by a light as it were of serenity infused into my heart, all the darkness of doubt vanished away.'

Even the typical procedure in Romantic wind-poems of beginning with the description of a natural scene and then moving to inner correspondences had precedents in prose and verse. During the Middle Ages the mode of self-inquisition and spiritual inventory, of which Augustine's *Confessions* became a prime exemplar, led to the identification of a standard condition of apathy and spiritual torpor called 'acedia,' or 'aridity,' or 'interior desolation,' closely related, according to Cassian, to another state of the soul called 'dejection' (*tristitia*).¹⁴ The descriptions of this interior condition and of its relief were sometimes couched in natural and seasonal metaphors: winter, drought, and desert, as against spring, the coming of rain, and the burgeoning plant or garden. Coleridge echoed the technical language of theology when, in a letter of March 25, 1801 which was a prose rehearsal for *Dejection*, he described his 'intellectual *exsiccation*,' a state in which 'the Poet is dead in me,' his imagination 'lies, like a Cold Snuff on the circular Rim of a Brass Candle-stick,' and he remains 'squat and square on the earth amid the hurricane.'¹⁵

In the later Renaissance the alternation of aridity and freshness, in which spiritual and imaginative death and rebirth are equated with aspects of the natural scene, became a frequent topic in the meditations of the religious poets. An instance in George Herbert is the pair of poems called *Employment*, which inspired Coleridge's *Work Without Hope*; another is *The Flower*, also a favorite of Coleridge, in which we find a complex interplay between the death-in-life and revival of the soul, of the poetic faculty, and of a perennial plant.

How fresh, O Lord, how sweet and clean
Are thy returns! Ev'n as the flowers in spring,
To which, besides their own demean,
The late-past frosts tributes of pleasure bring. . . .

And now in age I bud again,
After so many deaths I live and write;
I once more smell the dew and rain,

ENGLISH ROMANTIC POETS

And relish versing. O my only light,
 It cannot be
 That I am he
 On whom thy tempests fell all night.

Henry Vaughan at times approximates still more closely the familiar Romantic pattern of inner depression and revival, paralleled to changes in the landscape in diverse weathers and seasons. And the role of the wind is made explicit in poems such as *The Storm* and *Mount of Olives* (2), but above all in *Regeneration*. 'One day,' he says in that poem, 'I stole abroad.' 'It was high spring. . . . Yet was it frost within.' After traversing a spiritual landscape and toiling up a purgatorial mountain, he entered a flowery grove reminiscent of several earlier pleasantries, all of them wind-blown: Dante's Earthly Paradise, the garden which had been the setting of Augustine's conversion, and that favorite medieval symbol, the *hortus conclusus*, the closed garden, of the Song of Songs: ¹⁶

Here musing long, I heard
 A rushing wind
 Which still increased, but whence it stirred
 Nowhere I could not find. . . .

But while I list'ning sought
 My mind to ease
 By knowing where 'twas, or where not,
 It whispered: Where I please.

Lord, then said I, on me one breath,
 And let me die before my death!

The Romantic wind, then, is remote in kind from the pleasingly horrific storm dear to eighteenth-century connoisseurs of the natural sublime; and the confessional lyrics of dejection and recovery in which this wind plays its part are not (as common report would have it) in the tradition of the eighteenth-century poems of melancholy and spleen. These lyrics are rather secularized versions of an older devotional poetry, employed in the examination of the soul's condition as it approaches and retreats from God. Secularized—yet the religious element remains as at least a formal parallel, or a verbal or rhetorical echo. Coleridge's finest odes, including *Dejection* and *To William Wordsworth*, use theological language and end in the cadence of a prayer. Wordsworth's poetic meditations commonly involve a presence whose dwelling is the light of

setting suns. And even the pagan Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind* is a formal orison addressed to the Spirit and Breath of Autumn's Being.

IV

And now the question: What are we to make of the phenomenon of the correspondent breeze in Romantic poetry? These days the answer seems obvious enough, and it may have occasioned surprise that I have so long resisted calling the wind an 'archetypal image.' I should not hesitate to use so convenient a term, if it were merely a neutral way of identifying a persistent material symbol for a psychological condition. In the context of present critical theory, however, the term 'archetypal' commits the user to implications which are equally unnecessary and undesirable. For example, in order to explain the origin and currency of the correspondent wind it would seem adequate to point to the inescapable conditions of the human endowment and of its physical milieu. That breath and wind are both instances of air in motion, and that breathing is a sign of life and its cessation of death, are matters evident to casual observation, as are the alternations of inhalation and exhalation, despair and elation, imaginative energy and torpor, birth and death, in the constant environmental rhythms of calm and storm, drought and rain, winter and spring. If a connection between a universal inner experience and an omnipresent outer analogue has been made once, it will be made again, and may readily become a commonplace of oral and written tradition; there is no rational need to assume, as Jung does, that after leaving its mark on the nervous system the image goes underground, to emerge sporadically from the racial unconscious. But of course if we neutralize the archetype by eliminating dark allusions to 'primordial images,' or 'the racial memory,' or 'timeless depths,' archetypal criticism is drained of the mystique or pathos which is an important condition of its present vogue.

For literary criticism, moreover, the ultimate criterion is not whether a doctrine is a justifiable psychological hypothesis, but what it does when put to work interpreting a text. And from this point of view standard archetypal criticism can be charged with blurring, if it does not destroy, the properties of the literary products it undertakes to explicate. A mode of reading that persists in looking through the literal, particular, and artful qualities of a poem in order to discover a more important ulterior pattern of primitive, general, and unintended mean-

ings eliminates its individuality, and threatens to nullify even its status as a work of art. For the result of such reading is to collapse the rich diversity of individual works into one, or into a very limited number, of archetypal patterns, which any one poem shares not only with other poems, but with such unartful phenomena as myth, dreams, and the fantasies of psychosis.

Maud Bodkin's influential book, *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry*, intelligent and extremely suggestive though it is, provides a radical illustration of this process. Miss Bodkin begins her study by considering the significance of the wind in Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, and of the contrast between the becalmed ship and, after the blessing of the water snakes, the storm which drives the ship into violent motion. In the Romantic poems I have discussed, the rising wind was explicitly paralleled to a change in the inner state of the lyric speaker. *The Ancient Mariner*, on the other hand, is explicitly a narrative about the actions and sufferings of an unfortunate sailor; yet Miss Bodkin has no hesitation in reading the change from calm to storm as a symbolic projection—by the author—of the mental states that Jung calls 'progression and regression.' This psychic sequence constitutes the 'Rebirth archetype,' which is also manifested by the vegetation god of ritual and myth, is echoed in the resurrection of Christ, reappears in dreams, and in literature constitutes the basic pattern, among other works, of *Oedipus*, *Hamlet*, the Book of Jonah, the *Aeneid*, the *Divine Comedy*, *Paradise Lost*, *Kubla Khan*, and *Women in Love*. Once unleashed, indeed, the archetype proves insatiable, and goes on to assimilate even subhuman phenomena: Miss Bodkin (page 75) detects the characteristic pattern of the Night Journey and Rebirth in the behavior of Wolfgang Köhler's experimental apes, who passed through a period of baffled bewilderment before the flash of insight which enabled them to reach their banana.

These are astonishing equations, but the logical procedure by which they were achieved is simple enough. It consists in treating loose analogy as though it were identity. This strategy, to be sure, has a singular virtue; it cannot fail. Only leave out enough of the qualities that make a poem, or any complex experience, distinctive, and it can be reduced to an abstract pattern—almost any abstract pattern, including, if that is our inclination, the pattern of the vegetational cycle of death and rebirth. But by what a prodigious abstraction of everything that matters is a literary ballad, *The Ancient Mariner*, shown to be

identical in ultimate significance with tragedies, epics, novels, and lyrics, together with the basic formulae of myth and religion!

A procedure which ingeniously contrives to reduce all—or at least a great many—serious poems to variations upon a timeless theme is not much to the purpose of the literary critic, whose chief concern is with the particularity of a work; nor is it more useful to the literary historian, despite his greater interest in establishing literary types and the general qualities of a literary period. For example, we know that the use of the wind in Romantic poetry had ample precedent in myth, religion, and the poetry of religious meditation. Yet the correspondent breeze, like the guilt-haunted wanderer and the Promethean or Satanic figure of the heroic rebel, can justly be identified as a distinctively Romantic image, or icon. For one thing, there is no precedent for the way in which the symbolic wind was called upon by poet after poet, in poem after poem, all within the first few decades of the nineteenth century. For another, the fact that they explored the literary possibilities of myth and primitive thinking, and played secular variations on ancient devotional patterns, is itself characteristic of the Romantic poets. But above all, these writers exploited attributes of the wind which rendered it peculiarly apt for the philosophical, political, and aesthetic preoccupations of the age.

Thus Wordsworth's are, specifically, 'viewless winds,' which are 'unseen though not inaudible,'¹⁷ and Shelley's wind is an 'unseen presence.' When Blake denounced 'Single vision and Newton's sleep,' and Coleridge warned repeatedly against 'the despotism of the eye,' and Wordsworth, recalling his joy 'before the winds, And roaring waters, and in lights and shades,' decried the 'bodily eye' as 'the most despotic of our senses,' all attributed to an obsession with what is materially visible the diverse shortcomings of the eighteenth century, from its sensationist philosophy to its theory and practice of the arts.¹⁸ The wind, as an invisible power known only by its effects, had an even greater part to play than water, light, and clouds in the Romantic revolt against the world-view of the Enlightenment. In addition, the moving air lent itself pre-eminently to the aim of tying man back into the environment from which, Wordsworth and Coleridge felt, he had been divorced by post-Cartesian dualism and mechanism. For not only are nature's breezes the analogue of human respiration; they are themselves inhaled into the body and assimilated to its substance—the 'breezes and soft airs,' as Wordsworth said, 'find [their] way To the recesses of the soul,' and so fuse materially, as well as metaphorically, the 'soul' of man with the

'spirit' of nature. Lastly, the Romantic wind is typically a wild wind and a free one—Shelley's 'thou uncontrollable'—which, even when gentle, holds the threat of destructive violence. Wordsworth's 'gentle breeze,' greeted as messenger and friend by a captive 'coming from a house Of bondage, from yon City's walls set free,' soon, like the breeze in Coleridge's *Dejection*, mounts to 'a tempest. . . . Vexing its own creation.' These traits made the windstorm, as it had been earlier, a ready counterpart for the prophetic furor of the inspired poet. But they also rendered it a most eligible model for Romantic activism, as well as an emblem of the free Romantic spirit; and in an era obsessed with the fact and idea of revolution, they sanctioned a parallel, manifest in Shelley, with a purifying revolutionary violence which destroys in order to preserve.¹⁹

The Romantic ideal, it should be added, is that of a controlled violence, of a self-ordering impetus of passion, which Coleridge described in *To Matilda Betham*, and once again by analogy to the wind:

Poetic feelings, like the stretching boughs
Of mighty oaks, pay homage to the gales,
Toss in the strong winds, drive before the gust,
Themselves one giddy storm of fluttering leaves;
Yet, all the while self-limited, remain
Equally near the fixed and solid trunk
Of Truth and Nature in the howling storm,
As in the calm that stills the aspen grove.

This sovereign order in rage is, I think, characteristic of the longer Romantic lyric at its best. The tide of the systematic derogation of that achievement seems to be receding, but it may still be worth registering the judgment that the Romantic lyric at its best is equal to the greatest.

NOTES

1. 'Essay on the Poetical Works of Mr. Wordsworth,' *The Works of Sir Henry Taylor* (London, 1878), V, 1-4.

2. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. John Shawcross (Oxford, 1907), I, 5.

3. *A Defence of Poetry, Shelley's Literary and Philosophical Criticism*, ed. John Shawcross (London, 1909), p. 121.

4. Letters of 18 Oct. and 1 Nov. 1800, *Collected Letters*, ed. E. L. Griggs (Oxford, 1956), I, 638, 643. Genius, Coleridge wrote in his Notebook in 1806, may 'lie hid as beneath embers, till some sudden and awakening Gust

of regenerating Grace. . . rekindles and reveals it anew.' (Cited by George Whalley, *Coleridge and Sara Hutchinson*, London, 1955, p. 128).

5. 14 Jan. 1803, *Collected Letters*, II, 916. On October 20 of that year Coleridge wrote in his Notebook: 'Storm all night—the wind scourging and lashing the rain. . . I, half-dozing, list'ning to the same, not without solicitations of the poetic Feeling. . . .' (*The Notebooks of S. T. Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn, New York, 1957, I, Entry 1577).

6. 29 Nov. 1805, *The Early Letters of Wm. and Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. E. de Selincourt (Oxford, 1935), I, 547.

7. In his 'Prospectus' for *The Recluse*, Wordsworth wrote (*Poetical Works*, ed. E. de Selincourt and Helen Darlinshire, Oxford, 1949, V, 3):

To these emotions, whencesoe'er they come,
Whether from breath of outward circumstance,
Or from the soul—an impulse to herself—
I would give utterance in numerous verse.

8. I have inserted a passage from MS W into the standard version from *Sybelline Leaves*; see *The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. E. H. Coleridge (Oxford, 1912), I, 403-407.

9. *Autobiographic Sketches*, Chap. I: 'The Affliction of Childhood.'

10. *Alastor*, 41-6. In *A Defence of Poetry*, 'the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, wakens to transitory brightness.'

11. Cf. Dante's *Paradiso* II, 7ff.:

L'acqua ch'io prendo già mai non si corse;
Minerva spira, e conducemi Apollo.

Shelley's passage has a weak counterpart in the conclusion to Tennyson's *Locksley Hall*, where the abrupt turn from despair to hope, accompanied by the welling of 'ancient founts of inspiration,' materializes in a sudden outer storm:

Let it fall on Locksley Hall, with rain or hail, or fire or snow;
For the mighty wind arises, roaring seaward, and I go.

Valery's *Cimetière Marin* concludes with a similar turn:

Le vent se lève. Il faut tenter de vivre.

12. *The Civil War*, V, 82-101. In a draft of *Epipsychidion* Shelley described 'a Power' in mortal hearts,

A Pythian exhalation, which inspires
Love, only love—a wind which o'er the wires
Of the soul's giant harp. . .

(*The Complete Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, London, 1934, p. 429).

13. 1805 ed., I, 428-31; and MS fragment in de Selincourt, *The Prelude* (Oxford, 1950), p. 508.

14. Cassian, *The Institutes of the Coenobia*, Books IX and X. And see Sister Mary Madeleva, *Pearl: A Study in Spiritual Dryness* (New York, 1925).

15. *Collected Letters*, II, 713-14; cf. I, 470-1 (12 Mar. 1799), describing his imagination as 'flat and powerless,' and his inner state 'as if the organs of Life had been dried up; as if only simple BEING remained, blind and stagnant!'

16. For the winds in these gardens see Dante's *Purgatorio*, XXVIII, 7-21,

103-114; Augustine, *Confessions*, cited above; Song of Solomon 4: 12-16.

17. See above, and *The Prelude*, ed. de Selincourt, p. 3n.

18. Blake, letter to Thomas Butts, 22 Nov. 1802; Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, I, 74, and *Coleridge on Logic and Learning*, ed. Alice Snyder (New Haven, 1929), p. 126; Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (1850 ed.), XII, 93-131.

19. See also Northrop Frye's comment on Blake's 'the wind of Beulah that unroots the rocks and hills' as an analogue both of inspiration and destruction, in 'Notes for a Commentary on Milton,' *The Divine Vision*, ed. Vivian de S. Pinto (London, 1957), p. 125.

Blake's Treatment of the Archetype

THE READER of Blake soon becomes familiar with the words "innocence" and "experience." The world of experience is the world that adults live in while they are awake. It is a very big world, and a lot of it seems to be dead, but still it makes its own kind of sense. When we stare at it, it stares unwinkingly back, and the changes that occur in it are, on the whole, orderly and predictable changes. This quality in the world that reassures us we call law. Sitting in the middle of the lawful world is the society of awakened adults. This society consists of individuals who apparently have agreed to put certain restraints on themselves. So we say that human society is also controlled by law. Law, then, is the basis both of reason and of society: without it there is no happiness, and our philosophers tell us that they really do not know which is more splendid, the law of the starry heavens outside us, or the moral law within. True, there was a time when we were children and took a different view of life. In childhood happiness seemed to be based, not on law and reason, but on love, protection, and peace. But we can see now that such a view of life was an illusion derived from an excess of economic security. As Isaac Watts says, in a song of innocence which is thought to have inspired Blake:

Sleep, my babe; thy food and raiment,
House and home, thy friends provide;
All without thy care or payment:
All thy wants are well supplied.

From *English Institute Essays: 1950*, ed. Alan S. Downer (Columbia University Press, 1951), pp. 170-196. Reprinted by permission of the author and the publisher.

And after all, from the adult point of view, the child is not so innocent as he looks. He is actually a little bundle of anarchic will, whose desires take no account of either the social or the natural order. As he grows up and enters the world of law, his illegal desires can no longer be tolerated even by himself, and so they are driven underground into the world of the dream, to be joined there by new desires, mainly sexual in origin. In the dream, a blind, unreasoning, childish will is still at work revenging itself on experience and rearranging it in terms of desire. It is a great comfort to know that this world, in which we are compelled to spend about a third of our time, is unreal, and can never displace the world of experience in which reason predominates over passion, order over chaos, classical values over romantic ones, the solid over the gaseous, and the cool over the hot.

The world of law, stretching from the starry heavens to the moral conscience, is the domain of Urizen in Blake's symbolism. It sits on a volcano in which the rebellious Titan Orc, the spirit of passion, lies bound, writhing and struggling to get free. Each of these spirits is Satanic or devilish to the other. While we dream, Urizen, the principle of reality, is the censor, or, as Blake calls him, the accuser, a smug and grinning hypocrite, an impotent old man, the caricature that the child in us makes out of the adult world that thwarts him. But as long as we are awake, Orc, the lawless pleasure principle, is an evil dragon bound under the conscious world in chains, and we all hope he will stay there.

The dream world is, however, not quite securely bound: every so often it breaks loose and projects itself on society in the form of war. It seems odd that we should keep plunging with great relief into moral holidays of aggression in which robbery and murder become virtues instead of crimes. It almost suggests that keeping our desires in leash and seeing that others do likewise is a heavy and sooner or later an intolerable strain. On a still closer view, even the difference between war and law begins to blur. The social contract, which from a distance seems a reasonable effort of cooperation, looks closer up like an armed truce founded on passion, in which the real purpose of law is to defend by force what has been snatched in self-will. Plainly, we cannot settle the conflict of Orc and Urizen by siding with one against the other, still less by pretending that either of them is an illusion. We must look for a third factor in human life, one which meets the requirements of both the dream and the reality.

This third factor, called Los by Blake, might provisionally be called

work, or constructive activity. All such work operates in the world of experience: it takes account of law and of our waking ideas of reality. Work takes the energy which is wasted in war or thwarted in dreams and sets it free to act in experience. And as work cultivates land and makes farms and gardens out of jungle and wilderness, as it domesticates animals and builds cities, it becomes increasingly obvious that work is the realization of a dream and that this dream is descended from the child's lost vision of a world where the environment is the home.

The worker, then, does not call the world of experience real because he perceives it out of a habit acquired from his ancestors: it is real to him only as the material cause of his work. And the world of dreams is not unreal, but the formal cause: it dictates the desirable human shape which the work assumes. Work, therefore, by realizing in experience the child's and the dreamer's worlds, indicates what there is about each that is genuinely innocent. When we say that a child is in the state of innocence, we do not mean that he is sinless or harmless, but that he is able to assume a coherence, a simplicity and a kindliness in the world that adults have lost and wish they could regain. When we dream, we are, whatever we put into the dream, revolting against experience and creating another world, usually one we like better. Whatever in childhood or the dream is delivered and realized by work is innocent; whatever is suppressed or distorted by experience becomes selfish or vicious. "He who desires but acts not, breeds pestilence."

Work begins by imposing a human form on nature, for "Where man is not, nature is barren." But in society work collides with the cycle of law and war. A few seize all its benefits and become idlers, the work of the rest is wasted in supporting them, and so work is perverted into drudgery. "God made Man happy & Rich, but the Subtil made the innocent, Poor." Neither idleness nor drudgery can be work: real work is the creative act of a free man, and wherever real work is going on it is humanizing society as well as nature. The work that, projected on nature, forms civilization, becomes, when projected on society, prophecy, a vision of complete human freedom and equality. Such a vision is a revolutionary force in human life, destroying all the social barriers founded on idleness and all the intellectual ones founded on ignorance.

So far we have spoken only of what seems naturally and humanly possible, of what can be accomplished by human nature. But if we confine the conception of work to what now seems possible, we are still judging the dream by the canons of waking reality. In other words,

we have quite failed to distinguish work from law, Los from Urizen, and are back where we started. The real driving power of civilization and prophecy is not the mature mind's sophisticated and cautious adaptations of the child's or the dreamer's desires: it comes from the original and innocent form of those desires, with all their reckless disregard of the lessons of experience.

The creative root of civilization and prophecy can only be art, which deals not only with the possible, but with "probable impossibilities"—it is interesting to see Blake quoting Aristotle's phrase in one of his marginalia. And just as the controlling idea of civilization is the humanizing of nature, and the controlling idea of prophecy the emancipation of man, so the controlling idea of art, the source of them both, must be the simultaneous vision of both. This is apocalypse, the complete transformation of both nature and human nature into the same form. "Less than All cannot satisfy Man"; the child in us who cries for the moon will never stop crying until the moon is his plaything, until we are delivered from the tyranny of time, space, and death, from the remoteness of a gigantic nature and from our own weakness and selfishness. Man cannot be free until he is everywhere: at the center of the universe, like the child, and at the circumference of the universe, like the dreamer. Such an apocalypse is entirely impossible under the conditions of experience that we know, and could only take place in the eternal and infinite context that is given it by religion. In fact, Blake's view of art could almost be defined as the attempt to realize the religious vision in human society. Such religion has to be sharply distinguished from all forms of religion which have been kidnapped by the cycle of law and war, and have become capable only of reinforcing the social contract or of inspiring crusades.

When we say that the goal of human work can only be accomplished in eternity, many people would infer that this involves renouncing all practicable improvement of human status in favor of something which by hypothesis, remains forever out of man's reach. We make this inference because we confuse the eternal with the indefinite: we are so possessed by the categories of time and space that we can hardly think of eternity and infinity except as endless time and space, respectively. But the home of time, so to speak, the only part of time that man can live in, is now; and the home of space is here. In the world of experience there is no such time as now; the present never quite exists, but is hidden somewhere between a past that no longer exists and a future that does not yet exist. The mature man does not know where "here"

is: he can draw a circle around himself and say that "here" is inside it, but he cannot locate anything except a "there." In both time and space man is being continually excluded from his own home. The dreamer, whose space is inside his mind, has a better notion of where "here" is, and the child, who is not yet fully conscious of the iron chain of memory that binds his ego to time and space, still has some capacity for living in the present. It is to this perspective that man returns when his conception of "reality" begins to acquire some human meaning.

The Sky is an immortal Tent built by the Sons of Los:
 And every Space that a Man views around his dwelling-place
 Standing on his own roof or in his garden on a mount
 Of twenty-five cubits in height, such space in his Universe:
 And on its verge the Sun rises & sets, the Clouds bow
 To meet the flat Earth & the Sea in such an order'd Space:
 The Starry heavens reach no further, but here bend and set
 On all sides, & the two Poles turn on their valves of gold . . .

If the vision of innocence is taken out of its eternal and infinite context, the real here and now, and put inside time, it becomes either a myth of a Golden Age or a Paradise lost in the past, or a hope which is yet to be attained in the future, or both. If it is put inside space, it must be somewhere else, presumably in the sky. It is only these temporal and spatial perversions of the innocent vision that really do snatch it out of man's grasp. Because the innocent vision is so deep down in human consciousness and is subject to so much distortion, repression, and censorship, we naturally tend, when we project it on the outer world, to put it as far off in time and space as we can get it. But what the artist has to reveal, as a guide for the work of civilization and prophecy, is the form of the world as it would be if we could live in it here and now.

Innocence and experience are the middle two of four possible states. The state of experience Blake calls Generation, and the state of innocence, the potentially creative world of dreams and childhood, Beulah. Beyond Beulah is Eden, the world of the apocalypse in which innocence and experience have become the same thing, and below Generation is Ulro, the world as it is when no work is being done, the world where dreams are impotent and waking life haphazard. Eden and Ulro are, respectively, Blake's heaven or unfallen world and his hell or fallen world. Eden is the world of the creator and the creature, Beulah the world of the lover and the beloved, Generation the world

of the subject and the object, and Ulro the world of the ego and the enemy, or the obstacle. This is, of course, one world, looked at in four different ways. The four ways represent the four moods or states in which art is created: the apocalyptic mood of Eden, the idyllic mood of Beulah, the elegiac mood of Generation, and the satiric mood of Ulro. These four moods are the tonalities of Blake's expression; every poem of his regularly resolves on one of them.

For Blake the function of art is to reveal the human or intelligible form of the world, and it sees the other three states in relation to that form. This fact is the key to Blake's conception of imagery, the pattern of which I have tried to simplify by a table.

EXPERIENCE		CATEGORY	INNOCENCE	
<i>Individual Form</i>	<i>Collective Form</i>		<i>Collective Form</i>	<i>Individual Form</i>
sky-god (Nobodaddy)	aristocracy of gods	(1) Divine	human powers	incarnate God (Jesus)
a) leader and high priest (Caiaphas)	tyrants and victims	(2) Human	community	a) one man (Albion)
b) harlot (Rahab)				b) bride (Jerusalem)
dragon (Covering Cherub)	beasts of prey (tiger, leviathan)	(3) Animal	flock of sheep	one lamb (Bowlahoola)
tree of mystery	forest, wilder- ness (Enthu- thon Beny- thon)	(4) Vegetable	garden or park (Alla- manda)	tree of life
a) opaque furnace or brick kilns	a) city of destruction (Sodom, Baby- lon, Egypt)	(5) Mineral	city, temple (Golgonooza)	living stone
b) "Stone of Night"	b) ruins, caves			
(not given)	salt lake or dead sea (Udan Adan)	(6) Chaotic	fourfold river of life	"Globule of Blood"

Let us take the word "image" in its vulgar sense, which is good enough just now, of a verbal or pictorial replica of a physical object. For Blake

the real form of the object is what he calls its "human form." In Ulro, the world with no human work in it, the mineral kingdom consists mainly of shapeless rocks lying around at random. When man comes into the world, he tries to make cities, buildings, roads, and sculptures out of this mineral kingdom. Such human artifacts therefore constitute the intelligible form of the mineral world, the mineral world as human desire would like to see it. Similarly, the "natural" or unworked form of the vegetable world is a forest, a heath or a wilderness; its human and intelligible form is that of the garden, the grove, or the park, the last being the original meaning of the word Paradise. The natural form of the animal world consists of beasts of prey: its human form is a society of domesticated animals of which the flock of sheep is the most commonly employed symbol. The city, the garden and the sheepfold are thus the human forms of the mineral, vegetable, and animal kingdoms, respectively. Blake calls these archetypes Golgonooza, Allamanda, and Bowlahoola, and identifies them with the head, heart, and bowels of the total human form. Below the world of solid substance is a chaotic or liquid world, and the human form of that is the river or circulating body of fresh water.

Each of these human forms has a contrasting counterpart in Ulro, the world of undeveloped nature and regressive humanity. To the city which is the home of the soul or City of God, the fallen world opposes the city of destruction which is doomed through the breakdown of work described by Ezekiel in a passage quoted by Blake as "pride, fullness of bread and abundance of idleness." Against the image of the sheep in the pasture, we have the image of the forest inhabited by menacing beasts like the famous tiger, the blasted heath or waste land full of monsters, or the desert with its fiery serpents. To the river which is the water of life the fallen world opposes the image of the devouring sea and the dragons and leviathans in its depths. Blake usually calls the fallen city Babylon, the forest Entuthon Benython, and the dead sea or salt lake Udan Adan. Labyrinths and mazes are the only patterns of Ulro; images of highways and paths made straight belong to the world informed with intelligence.

The essential principle of the fallen world appears to be discreteness or opacity. Whatever we see in it we see as a self-enclosed entity, unlike all others. When we say that two things are identical, we mean that they are very similar; in other words "identity" is a meaningless word in ordinary experience. Hence in Ulro, and even in Generation, all classes or societies are aggregates of similar but separate individ-

uals. But when man builds houses out of stones, and cities out of houses, it becomes clear that the real or intelligible form of a thing includes its relation to its environment as well as its self-contained existence. This environment is its own larger "human form." The stones that make a city do not cease to be stones, but they cease to be separate stones: their purpose, shape, and function is identical with that of the city as a whole. In the human world, as in the work of art, the individual thing is there, and the total form which gives it meaning is there: what has vanished is the shapeless collection or mass of similar things. This is what Blake means when he says that in the apocalypse all human forms are "identified." The same is true of the effect of work on human society. In a completely human society man would not lose his individuality, but he would lose his separate and isolated ego, what Blake calls his Selfhood. The prophetic vision of freedom and equality thus cannot stop at the Generation level of a Utopia, which means an orderly molecular aggregate of individuals existing in some future time. Such a vision does not capture, though it may adumbrate, the real form of society, which can only be a larger human body. This means literally the body of one man, though not of a separate man.

Everywhere in the human world we find that the Ulro distinction between the singular and the plural has broken down. The real form of human society is the body of one man; the flock of sheep is the body of one lamb; the garden is the body of one tree, the so-called tree of life. The city is the body of one building or temple, a house of many mansions, and the building itself is the body of one stone, a glowing and fiery precious stone, the unfallen stone of alchemy which assimilates everything else to itself, Blake's grain of sand which contains the world.

The second great principle of Ulro is the principle of hierarchy or degree which produces the great chain of being. In the human world there is no chain of being: all aspects of existence are equal as well as identical. The one man is also the one lamb, and the body and blood of the animal form are the bread and wine which are the human forms of the vegetable world. The tree of life is the upright vertebrate form of man; the living stone, the glowing transparent furnace, is the furnace of heart and lungs and bowels in the animal body. The river of life is the blood that circulates within that body. Eden, which according to Blake was a city as well as a garden, had a fourfold river, but no sea, for the river remained inside Paradise, which was the body of

one man. England is an island in the sea, like St. John's Patmos; the human form of England is Atlantis, the island which has replaced the sea. Again, where there is no longer any difference between society and the individual, there can hardly be any difference between society and marriage or between a home and a wife or child. Hence Jerusalem in Blake is "A City, yet a Woman," and at the same time the vision of innocent human society.

On the analogy of the chain of being, it is natural for man to invent an imaginary category of gods above him, and he usually locates them in what is above him in space, that is, the sky. The more developed society is, the more clearly man realizes that a society of gods would have to be, like the society of man, the body of one God. Eventually he realizes that the intelligible forms of man and of whatever is above man on the chain of being must be identical. The identity of God and man is for Blake the whole of Christianity: the adoration of a superhuman God he calls natural religion, because the source of it is remote and unconquered nature. In other words, the superhuman God is the deified accuser or censor of waking experience, whose function it is to discourage further work. Blake calls this God Nobodaddy, and curses and reviles him so much that some have inferred that he was inspired by an obscure psychological compulsion to attack the Fatherhood of God. Blake is doing nothing of the kind, as a glance at the last plate of *Jerusalem* will soon show: he is merely insisting that man cannot approach the superhuman aspect of God except through Christ, the God who is Man. If man attempts to approach the Father directly, as Milton, for instance, does in a few unlucky passages in *Paradise Lost*, all he will ever get is Nobodaddy. Theologically, the only unusual feature of Blake is not his attitude to the person of the Father, but his use of what is technically known as pre-existence: the doctrine that the humanity of Christ is coeternal with his divinity.

There is nothing in the Ulro world corresponding to the identity of the individual and the total form in the unfallen one. But natural religion, being a parody of real religion, often develops a set of individual symbols corresponding to the lamb, the tree of life, the glowing stone, and the rest. This consolidation of Ulro symbols Blake calls Druidism. Man progresses toward a free and equal community, and regresses toward tyranny; and as the human form of the community is Christ, the one God who is one Man, so the human form of tyranny is the isolated hero or inscrutable leader with his back to an aggregate of followers, or the priest of a veiled temple with an imaginary sky-god supposed

to be behind the veil. The Biblical prototypes of this leader and priest are Moses and Aaron. Against the tree of life we have what Blake calls the tree of mystery, the barren fig tree, the dead tree of the cross, Adam's tree of knowledge, with its forbidden fruit corresponding to the fruits of healing on the tree of life. Against the fiery precious stone, the bodily form in which John saw God "like a jasper and a sardine stone," we have the furnace, the prison of heat without light which is the form of the opaque warm-blooded body in the world of frustration, or the stone of Druidical sacrifice like the one that Hardy associates with Tess. Against the animal body of the lamb, we have the figure that Blake calls, after Ezekiel, the Covering Cherub, who represents a great many things, the unreal world of gods, human tyranny and exploitation, and the remoteness of the sky, but whose animal form is that of the serpent or dragon wrapped around the forbidden tree. The dragon, being both monstrous and fictitious, is the best animal representative of the bogies inspired by human inertia: the Book of Revelation calls it "the beast that was, and is not, and yet is."

Once we have understood Blake's scheme of imagery, we have broken the back of one of the main obstacles to reading the prophecies: the difficulty in grasping their narrative structure. Narrative is normally the first thing we look for in trying to read a long poem, but Blake's poems are presented as a series of engraved plates, and the mental process of following a narrative sequence is, especially in the later poems, subordinated to a process of comprehending an inter-related pattern of images and ideas. The plate in Blake's epics has a function rather similar to that of the stanza with its final alexandrine in *The Faerie Queene*: it brings the narrative to a full stop and forces the reader to try to build up from the narrative his own reconstruction of the author's meaning. Blake thinks almost entirely in terms of two narrative structures. One of these is the narrative of history, the cycle of law and war, the conflict of Orc and Urizen, which in itself has no end and no point and may be called the tragic or historical vision of life. The other is the comic vision of the apocalypse or work of Los, the clarification of the mind which enables one to grasp the human form of the world. But the latter is not concerned with temporal sequence and is consequently not so much a real narrative as a dialectic.

The tragic narrative is the story of how the dream world escapes into experience and is gradually imprisoned by experience. This is the main theme of heroic or romantic poetry and is represented in Blake by Orc. Orc is first shown us, in the "Preludium" to *America*, as the

libido of the dream, a boy lusting for a dim maternal figure and bitterly hating an old man who keeps him in chains. Then we see him as the conquering hero of romance, killing dragons and sea monsters, ridding the barren land of its impotent aged kings, freeing imprisoned women, and giving new hope to men. Finally we see him subside into the world of darkness again from whence he emerged, as the world of law slowly recovers its balance. His rise and decline has the rotary movement of the solar and seasonal cycles, and like them is a part of the legal machinery of nature.

Blake has a strong moral objection to all heroic poetry that does not see heroism in its proper tragic context, and even when it does, he is suspicious of it. For him the whole conception of *κλέα ἀνδρῶν* as being in itself, without regard to the larger consequences of brave deeds, a legitimate theme for poetry, has been completely outmoded. It has been outmoded, for one thing, by Christianity, which has brought to the theme of the heroic act a radically new conception of what a hero is and what an act is. The true hero is the man who, whether as thinker, fighter, artist, martyr, or ordinary worker, helps in achieving the apocalyptic vision of art; and an act is anything that has a real relation to that achievement. Events such as the battle of Agincourt or the retreat from Moscow are not really heroic, because they are not really acts: they are part of the purposeless warfare of the state of nature and are not progressing towards a better kind of humanity. So Blake is interested in Orc only when his heroism appears to coincide with something of potentially apocalyptic importance, like the French or American revolutions.

For the rest, he keeps Orc strictly subordinated to his main theme of the progressive work of Los, the source of which is found in prophetic scriptures, especially, of course, the Bible. Comprehensive as his view of art is, Blake does not exactly say that the Bible is a work of art: he says "The Old & New Testaments are the Great Code of Art." The Bible tells the artist what the function of art is and what his creative powers are trying to accomplish. Apart from its historical and political applications, Blake's symbolism is almost entirely Biblical in origin, and the subordination of the heroic Orc theme to the apocalyptic Los theme follows the Biblical pattern.

The tragic vision of life has the rhythm of the individual's organic cycle: it rises in the middle and declines at the end. The apocalyptic theme turns the tragic vision inside out. The tragedy comes in the middle, with the eclipse of the innocent vision, and the story ends with

the re-establishment of the vision. Blake's major myth thus breaks into two parts, a Genesis and an Exodus. The first part accounts for the existence of the world of experience in terms of the myths of creation and fall. Blake sees no difference between creation and fall, between establishing the Ulro world and placing man in it. How man fell out of a city and garden is told twice in Genesis, once of Adam and once of Israel—Israel, who corresponds to Albion in Blake's symbolism, being both a community and a single man. The Book of Genesis ends with Israel in Egypt, the city of destruction. In the Book of Exodus we find the state of experience described in a comprehensive body of Ulro symbols. There is the fallen civilization of Egypt, destroyed by the plagues which its own tyranny has raised, the devouring sea, the desert with its fiery serpents, the leader and the priest, the invisible sky god who confirms their despotic power, and the labyrinthine wanderings of a people who have nothing but law and are unable to work. Society has been reduced to a frightened rabble following a leader who obviously has no notion of where he is going. In front of it is the Promised Land with its milk and honey, but all the people can see are enemies, giants, and mysterious terrors. From there on the story splits in two. The histories go on with the Orc or heroic narrative of how the Israelites conquered Canaan and proceeded to run through another cycle from bondage in Egypt to bondage in Babylon. But in the prophecies, as they advance from social criticism to apocalyptic, the Promised Land is the city and garden that all human effort is trying to reach, and its conqueror can only be the Messiah or true form of man.

The New Testament has the same structure as the Old. In the life of Jesus the story of the Exodus is repeated. Jesus is carried off to Egypt by a father whose name is Joseph, Herod corresponds to Pharaoh, and the massacre of the innocents to the attempts to exterminate the Hebrew children. The organizing of Christianity around twelve disciples corresponds to the organizing of the religion of Israel among twelve tribes, the forty days wandering of Jesus in the desert to the forty years of Israel, the crucifixion to the lifting of the brazen serpent on the pole, and the resurrection to the invasion of Canaan by Joshua, who has the same name as Jesus. From there on the New Testament splits into a historical section describing the beginning of a new Christian cycle, which is reaching its Babylonian phase in Blake's own time, and a prophetic section, the Book of Revelation, which deals with what it describes, in a phrase which has fascinated so many apocalyptic thinkers from Joachim of Floris to Blake, as the "everlasting gos-

pel," the story of Jesus told not historically as an event in the past, but visually as a real presence.

The characters of Blake's poems, Orc, Los, Urizen, Vala, and the rest, take shape in accordance with Blake's idea of the real act. No word in the language contains a greater etymological lie than the word "individual." The so-called undivided man is a battleground of conflicting forces, and the appearance of consistency in his behavior derives from the force that usually takes the lead. To get at the real elements of human character, one needs to get past the individual into the *dramatis personae* that make up his behavior. Blake's analysis of the individual shows a good many parallels with more recent analyses, especially those of Freud and Jung. The scheme of the Four Zoas is strikingly Freudian, and the contrast of the Orc and Los themes in Blake is very like the contrast between Jung's early book on the libido and his later study of the symbols of individuation. Jung's anima and persona are closely analogous to Blake's emanation and specter, and his counsellor and shadow seem to have some relation to Blake's Los and Spectre of Urthona.

But a therapeutic approach will still relate any such analysis primarily to the individual. In Blake anything that is a significant act of individual behavior is also a significant act of social behavior. Orc, the libido, produces revolution in society; Vala, the elusive anima, produces the social code of *Frauendienst*; Urizen, the moral censor, produces the religion of the externalized God. "We who dwell on Earth can do nothing of ourselves," says Blake: "everything is conducted by Spirits." Man performs no act as an individual: all his acts are determined by an inner force which is also a social and historical force, and they derive their significance from their relation to the total human act, restoration of the innocent world. John Doe does nothing as John Doe: he eats and sleeps in the spirit of Orc the Polypus: he obeys laws in the spirit of Urizen the conscience; he loses his temper in the spirit of Tharmas the destroyer; and he dies in the spirit of Satan the death-impulse.

Furthermore, as the goal of life is the humanization of nature, there is a profound similarity between human and natural behavior, which in the apocalypse becomes identity. It is a glimmering of this fact that has produced the god, the personalized aspect of nature, and a belief in gods gradually builds the sense of an omnipotent personal community out of nature. As long as these gods remain on the other side of nature, they are merely the shadows of superstition: when they are

seen to be the real elements of human life as well, we have discovered the key to all symbolism in art. Blake's Tharmas, the "id" of the individual and the stampeding mob of society, is also the god of the sea, Poseidon the earth-shaker. His connection with the sea is not founded on resemblance or association, but, like the storm scene in *King Lear*, on an ultimate identity of human rage and natural tempest.

In the opening plates of *Jerusalem* Blake has left us a poignant account of one such struggle of contending forces within himself, between his creative powers and his egocentric will. He saw the Industrial Revolution and the great political and cultural changes that came with it, and he realized that something profoundly new and disquieting was coming into the world, something with unlimited possibilities for good or for evil, which it would tax all his powers to interpret. And so his natural desire to make his living as an engraver and a figure in society collided with an overwhelming impulse to tell the whole poetic truth about what he saw. The latter force won, and dictated its terms accordingly. He was not allowed to worry about his audience. He revised, but was not allowed to decorate or stylize, only to say what had to be said. He was not allowed the double talk of the sophisticated poet, who can address several levels of readers at once by using familiar conceptions ambiguously. Nothing was allowed him but a terrifying concentration of his powers of utterance.

What finally emerged, out of one of the hottest poetic crucibles of modern times, was a poetry which consisted almost entirely in the articulation of archetypes. By an archetype I mean an element in a work of literature, whether a character, an image, a narrative formula, or an idea, which can be assimilated to a larger unifying category. The existence of such a category depends on the existence of a unified conception of art. Blake began his prophecies with a powerfully integrated theory of the nature, structure, function, and meaning of art, and all the symbolic units of his poetry, his moods, his images, his narratives and his characters, form archetypes of that theory. Given his premises about art, everything he does logically follows. His premises may be wrong, but there are two things which may make us hesitate to call them absurd. One is their comprehensiveness and consistency: if the Bible is the code of art, Blake seems to provide something of a code of modern art, both in his structure of symbols and in his range of ideas. The other is their relationship to earlier traditions of criticism. Theories of poetry and of archetypes seem to belong to criticism rather than to poetry itself, and when I speak of Blake's treatment

of the archetype I imply that Blake is a poet of unique interest to critics like ourselves. The Biblical origin of his symbolism and his apocalyptic theory of perception have a great deal in common with the theory of anagoge which underlies the poetry of Dante, the main structure of which survived through the Renaissance at least as late as Milton. Blake had the same creative powers as other great poets, but he made a very unusual effort to drag them up to consciousness, and to do deliberately what most poets prefer to do instinctively. It is possible that what impelled him to do this was the breakdown of a tradition of criticism which could have answered a very important question. Blake did not need the answer, but we do.

The question relates to the application of Blake's archetypes to the criticism of poetry as a whole. The papers delivered to this body of scholars are supposed to deal with general issues of criticism rather than with pure research. Now pure research is, up to a point, a co-ordinated and systematic form of study, and the question arises whether general criticism could also acquire a systematic form. In other words, is criticism a mere aggregate of research and comment and generalization, or is it, considered as a whole, an intelligible structure of knowledge? If the latter, there must be a quality in literature which enables it to be so, an order of words corresponding to the order of nature which makes the natural sciences intelligible. If criticism is more than aggregated commentary, literature must be somewhat more than an aggregate of poems and plays and novels: it must possess some kind of total form which criticism can in some measure grasp and expound.

It is on this question that the possibility of literary archetypes depends. If there is no total structure of literature, and no intelligible form to criticism as a whole, then there is no such thing as an archetype. The only organizing principle so far discovered in literature is chronology, and consequently all our larger critical categories are concerned with sources and direct transmission. But every student of literature has, whether consciously or not, picked up thousands of resemblances, analogies, and parallels in his reading where there is no question of direct transmission. If there are no archetypes, then these must be merely private associations, and the connections among them must be arbitrary and fanciful. But if criticism makes sense, and literature makes sense, then the mental processes of the cultivated reader may be found to make sense too.

The difficulty of a "private mythology" is not peculiar to Blake:

every poet has a private mythology, his own formation of symbols. His mythology is a cross-section of his life, and the critic, like the biographer, has the job of making sure that what was private to the poet shall be public to everyone else. But, having no theory of archetypes, we do not know how to proceed. Blake supplies us with a few leading principles which may guide us in analyzing the symbolic formation of poets and isolating the archetypal elements in them. Out of such a study the structure of literature may slowly begin to emerge, and criticism, in interpreting that structure, may take its rightful place among the major disciplines of modern thought. There is, of course, the possibility that the study of Blake is a long and tortuous blind alley, but those who are able to use Blake's symbols as a calculus for all their criticism will not be much inclined to consider it.

The question that we have just tried to answer, however, is not the one that the student of Blake most frequently meets. The latter question runs in effect: you may show that Blake had one of the most powerful minds in the modern world, that his thought is staggeringly comprehensive and consistent, that his insight was profound, his mood exalted, and his usefulness to critics unlimited. But surely all this profits a poet nothing if he does not preserve the hieratic decorum of conventional poetic utterance. And how are we to evaluate an utterance which is now lucid epigram and now a mere clashing of symbols, now disciplined and lovely verse and now a rush of prosy gabble? Whatever it is, is it really poetry or really great and good poetry? Well, probably not, in terms of what criticism now knows, or thinks it knows, about the canons of beauty and the form of literary expression.

Othello was merely a bloody farce in terms of what the learned and acute Thomas Rymer knew about drama. Rymer was perfectly right in his own terms; he is like the people who say that Blake was mad. One cannot refute them; one merely loses interest in their conception of sanity. And critics may be as right about Blake as Rymer was about Shakespeare, and still be just as wrong. We do not yet know whether literature and criticism are forms or aggregates: we know almost nothing about archetypes or about any of the great critical problems connected with them. In Dante's day critics did know something about the symbols of the Bible, but we have made little effort to recover that knowledge. We do not know very much even about genres: we do not know whether Blake's "prophecy" form is a real genre or not, and we certainly do not know how to treat it if it is. I leave the question of Blake's language in more competent hands, but after all,

even the poets are only beginning to assimilate contemporary speech, and when the speech of *Jerusalem* becomes so blunt and colloquial that Blake himself calls it prosaic, do critics really know whether it is too prosaic to be poetic, or even whether such an antithesis exists at all? I may be speaking only of myself, for criticism today is full of confident value-judgments, on Blake and on everyone else, implying a complete understanding of all such mysteries. But I wonder if these are really critical judgments, or if they are merely the aberrations of the history of taste. I suspect that a long course of patient and detailed study lies ahead of us before we really know much about the critical problems which the study of Blake raises, and which have to be reckoned with in making any value-judgment on him. Then we shall understand the poets, including Blake, much better, and I am not concerned with what the results of that better understanding will be.

Blake: The Historical Approach

"I HAVE IMPOSED on myself . . . grossly," wrote a schemer who had tried to impose on Blake but had mistaken his man, "I have imposed on myself . . . grossly in believing you to be one altogether abstracted from this world, holding converse with the world of spirits!" The miracle is common, but it is not exactly gross.

Blake himself encouraged it. "My abstract folly hurries me often away while I am at work," he told Thomas Butts, the muster clerk who bought his paintings, "carrying me over Mountains & Valleys, which are not Real, in a Land of Abstraction where Spectres of the Dead wander." A more straightforward person, or Blake in a more forthright record, might have said: I find it difficult to keep busy at this miniature portrait of Mrs. Butts,¹ because my mind wanders to the battlefield where men are dying, and then I see in my mind's eye the spirits of the contending powers.

We do not impose on ourselves if we believe that Blake held converse with the world of spirits, but we do if we think of either the poet or his spirits as "altogether abstracted from this world." As an observer of his own introspection, Blake understood the process of abstraction better than that; he knew that "it is impossible to think without images of somewhat [something] on this earth." At the age of twenty-six he saw Lunardi's first English demonstration of lighter-than-air craft (unless he was one of the few hapless Londoners who did not come out of their houses that day), and he knew that balloon navigators take

From *English Institute Essays: 1950*, ed. Alan S. Downer (New York, Columbia University Press, 1951), pp. 197-223. Reprinted, as revised by the author, by permission of the author and the publisher.

some earth with them for ballast. When Blake soared, he did not expect to escape from the world of Bacon and Newton and Pitt, but to change its laws of gravity: "I . . . with my whole might chain my feet to the world of Duty & Reality," he explained; "but . . . the faster I bind, the better is the Ballast, for I, so far from being bound down, take the world with me in my flights."

We now understand this about Blake, in the sense that we recognize that he kept his sanity in spite of what he called "Nervous Fear" at the terrors of the times he lived in. "Fires inwrap the earthly globe," he wrote in 1793, "yet man is not consum'd." We may also understand it as a clue to his meaning, in the sense that Blake always kept his visions oriented in time and space, always knew where the sun was rising and what his horizons were. A person who wanted to escape the world altogether would not bother about horizons. But Blake never expected to get rid of his Urizen; he hoped only to teach him to be elastic and responsive as "the bound or outward circumference of Energy"—he hoped only to change Urizen from a workmaster to a schoolmaster who would recognize his own limitations and never bind fast the infant "joys & desires." Blake did not like the *status quo*, but he loved England's green and pleasant land. He did not like the "turrets & towers & domes Whose smoke destroy'd the pleasant gardens, & whose running kennels Chok'd the bright rivers"; but his program was reconstruction, not emigration; he welcomed the "golden Builders" who were expanding London's suburbs. He stood "in London's darkness" when he wrote "of the building of Golgonooza, & of the terrors of Entuthon."

I heard in Lambeth's shades.

In Felpham I heard and saw the Visions of Albion.

I write in South Molton Street what I both see and hear

In regions of Humanity, in London's opening streets.

To William Blake, Time and Space were "Real Beings," and history was a very real, if "emblematic," texture.

I

The aim of the historical approach is to approximate Blake's own perspective, to locate, as nearly as we can, the moment and place in which he stood, to discover what he saw and heard in London's streets—what loomed on the horizon and what sounds filled the air.

The value of doing this for Blake's lyric poems may be open to ques-

tion. For example, the "London" of *Songs of Experience* is a successful general symbol. In the lines

In every voice, in every ban,
The mind-forg'd manacles I hear,

everyone will agree that the phrase "mind-forg'd manacles" is an improvement in many ways over the rejected earlier wording, "german forgèd links." And since we can do pretty well with the poem in contexts of our own manufacture or out of our own experience, some people will doubt the value of pursuing the clue of the rejected reading, "german forgèd," to discover that when Blake wrote the poem there was alarm among freeborn Englishmen that German George, the King of England, might be preparing to bring in "subsidized Hessians and Hanoverians" "to cut the throats of Englishmen," by way of following up the reiterated royal "ban" or Proclamation against Seditious Writings, the intent of which was to put manacles on such men as Paine and Blake.² Nevertheless, the poem does gain poignancy when read as a cry of anguish from a city in the toils of antijacobinism. And our footnote does at least discourage the assumption that Blake meant to say that the victims of tyranny are victims simply of manacles forged in their own minds. We see that he was writing about thought control as well as controlled thoughts.

Again, "The Tyger" is everyone's private possession and an inexhaustible general symbol. Yet it is possible for us to enlarge our view of its cosmic blacksmithery by considering those points at which the images of "The Tyger" touch the images of Blake's *French Revolution* and *The Four Zoas*. In a synoptic vision of the defeat of royal armies, as at Yorktown and at Valmy, Blake says "the stars threw down their spears." At the climax of "The Tyger" he uses the same words. We can at least observe, if we wisely hesitate to draw conclusions, that Blake speaks of the vindication of the American and French revolutions in the same terms that he uses to suggest the vindication of the creation of the tiger.

In short, the *Songs of Experience* are well-nigh perfect crystals in themselves, and yet as critics of their essential force and brilliance—and of course as literary historians—we gain by knowing that they were created in the Year One of Equality, in the time of the birth of the French Republic and the London Corresponding Society.

The value of applying historical research to the avowedly prophetic and manifestly historical writings, on the other hand, should be be-

yond question. Yet not merely the difficulty of the task, but the sophisticated tradition through which Blake has come to us and which still directs our attention largely another way, have thus far prevented its being attempted in any thorough fashion.

Consider how the neglect of historical particulars impedes the progress of Professors Sloss and Wallis, the almost indefatigable editors of *William Blake's Prophetic Writings*, in their pursuit of the wandering Zoas. On the assumption that history and Blake's kind of "prophecy" are unrelated, they omit his *French Revolution* from their canon and with it many a passage that could shed light on later symbols. And when, in Blake's "long resounding, strong heroic verse," they come upon remarks about "War on the Rhine & Danube," they note in passing that Blake may be referring to the Napoleonic Wars. But these editors treat the wars of Urizen and Luvah as altogether abstract, for they have snipped off the clue thread that the poet provided when he said "Luvah is France" and they have neglected the trail that leads back from Urizen to George the Third, via the canceled plates of *America*. For example, at one point in *The Four Zoas*, near the end of Night I, aggressive Urizen, after having brooded "Eternal death to Luvah" and threatened a long war, suddenly reverses his field:

But Urizen, with darkness overspreading all the armies,
Sent round his heralds, secretly commanding to depart
Into the north. Sudden, with thunder's sound, his multitudes
Retreat from the fierce conflict . . .
Mustering together in thick clouds, leaving the rage of Luvah
To pour its fury on himself & on the Eternal Man.

"Points like this which do not explain themselves," say the editors, "can receive no light from without." I am afraid we must apply to the editors themselves, as well as to Urizen's armies, the lines which immediately follow: "Sudden down fell they all together into an unknown Space, Deep, horrible, without End."

This can happen to any of us on our way through *The Four Zoas*, and I do not mean to sound lofty. But the historical approach tells us that Night I contains a survey of the diplomatic and military relations between Britain and France up through 1799 and that at this point we have come to Britain's ill-fated Netherlands campaign, during which 36,000 men marched out and 20,000 marched back very precipitately, after fierce conflict, leaving the rage of Luvah or Napoleon to vent its fury on himself and on humanity ("the Eternal Man"). Na-

poleon was in a mood to do so, because he had just come through his coup of 18th Brumaire, which is described by Blake as a transformation of form from human to reptilian.³

I do not mean to imply that everything comes clear with the application of a little current history. In Blake's writings, as he has warned us, "there are many angles," and even the historical angle is never constant. The bard prefers to "walk up & down in 6,000 years," transposing furiously, translating the acts of Robespierre into those of Moses or abstracting the British heroes into their spiritual forms or telescoping together the Biblical and modern rebellions of slaves against Pharaohs in "dark Africa."

Sometimes we can understand a good deal of Blake's argument without paying much attention to his historical referents or even being aware of them. A great deal of Blake criticism, some of it very valuable in literary and philosophical insight, gets along famously in the swirling vortex of Blake's oratory without attending to what, in the narrowest literal sense, he is talking about, or, to put the matter another way, without asking just precisely which historical persons or events have appeared to Blake as manifestations of eternal archetypes. The increasing interest in Blake's social thought, however, and in his excitement about the industrial revolution which did—and the social revolution which did not—take place while he was writing, now makes imperative the clearest possible definition of his minute particulars, especially of the dates and contexts of those works in which he deals with the history of his own times.

We speak loosely of all Blake's difficult works as "prophetic," yet in so figurative a sense that it is not customary to look for any literal message for the times—even in those two poems he himself called prophecies: *America, a Prophecy*, 1793, and *Europe, a Prophecy*, 1794. Yet Blake defined the nature of prophecy quite literally as an honest man's warning that "if you go on So, the result is So." And the warning of *America* is plain enough: that if kings such as Albion's Prince repeat against the Republic of France, in 1793, the crusade that failed against the Republic of America, they will reach the end of their rule over the people, who are "the strong."

The warning of *Europe*, in 1794, is more veiled and less specific in its prediction. But in its own language it is directed to Pitt and Parliament. It traces the steps leading to Britain's declaration of war in February, 1793, and describes the effect of the "gagging acts" of the following year. And its warning is that the trumpet of British power has

marked the end of all royal power, for the war now raging is Armageddon, and the bloody sun now rising in France is the light of Christ's Second Coming. The peaceful child of 1789 seemed easy to wrap in swaddling clothes, but the "terrible Orc" of the embattled Republic will brook no counterrevolutionary attempt to crucify him. "The blood-thirsty people across the water," as Blake put it crudely in his notebook, "Will not submit to gibbet & halter."

If this interpretation can be demonstrated (and I believe that my chapter which does so is pretty securely based), how is it possible that with only one exception that I know of (Jacob Bronowski) critics have mistaken the obviously historical part of *Europe, a Prophecy* for a summary of events leading up to the French Revolution of 1789, a matter scarcely prophetic in any immediate sense? The answer is partly that even Mr. Schorer, with all his interest in the social theme, has been so busy dispelling the fogs of mysticism around Blake that he has left it to those who follow to explore the cleared ground. A more implicit difficulty is the fog in Blake's style itself. Nowhere is his private nomenclature more puzzling than in *Europe*; nowhere is there more sly shifting from one level of discourse to another, more difficulty with ambiguities of punctuation and sudden changes of pace. Yet once we have separated the central narrative (lines 60-150 and 198-206) from the surrounding mythological framework (which reaches from the morning of Christ's Nativity to the day of his Second Coming) we are dealing with an orderly sequence of events which can be fitted into the calendar of secular history as soon as we can date some of the minute particulars.

An example will illustrate the sort of detective work that can be done and that flows logically from the recognition that Blake's prophecy really deals with current events—and from an awareness that Blake, in dealing with current politics, is not altogether apart from the main stream of eighteenth-century political satire. Miss Miles has discovered a major source of Blake's language in the language of social satire.⁴ In a recent note in *The Art Quarterly* (Spring, 1949) I have called attention to Blake's use of themes in the political caricatures of James Gillray. In the text of *Europe* Blake describes a groveling "Guardian of the secret codes" in flight from Westminster Hall or the Houses of Parliament. He does not draw a picture of the incident, but in Gillray's caricatures there are two, "The Fall of the Wolsey of the Woolsack" and "Sin, Death and the Devil," published in May and June, 1792, which is acceptable as the year "before the trumpet blew"

if we take the trumpet as Pitt's declaration of war against France. Both prints commemorate Pitt's ousting from his cabinet of the Lord High Chancellor Thurlow, Keeper of the Seal and Guardian of the King's Conscience. In the second print, which is a parody of Fuseli and of Milton, Thurlow is the Devil, Pitt is Death, and the Queen (for Pitt was a Queen's man at the time) is Sin, carrying the key to the backstairs and all our woe.⁵

Pitt, who had been trying to rid himself of the formidable Thurlow for some time, found his opportunity when the chancellor ridiculed Pitt's Sinking Fund Bill as the work of "a mere reptile of a minister" and told Parliament that no bill should attempt to bind future governments. The grain of sedition in this remark must have seemed infinitesimal even in 1792. But Pitt, counting on his own indispensability at a time when he had filled the royal mind with constitutional alarm, asked the king to dismiss his Guardian, and the king obliged.

Blake treats the episode as a sign that the revolutionary world crisis has singed even the great Guardian of British law:

Above the rest the howl was heard from Westminster louder & louder;
The Guardian of the secret codes forsook his ancient mansion,
Driven out by the flames of Orc; his furr'd robes & false locks
Adhered and grew one with his flesh, and nerves & veins shot thro' them.
With dismal torment sick, hanging upon the wind, he fled
Groveling along Great George Street thro' the Park gate: all the soldiers
Fled from his sight: he drag'd his torments to the wilderness.

The "howl . . . louder & louder" of the judge driven out by the flames of rebellion may echo the "Irregular Ode" in the *Rolliad*, in which Thurlow on an earlier occasion is depicted as warning "every rebel soul" to tremble, as he grows "profane" with a "louder yet, and yet a louder strain."

Blake's particulars are unambiguous. The street that led from Westminster Hall, the mansion of the law, to St. James's Park was Great George Street. Blake's description of the chancellor in his dismal torment is as informed as the account in Thurlow's standard biography, where we read of his drive through the park to St. James's Palace to surrender the Seal, his dejection as "a solitary outcast," and his "diminished consequence" when seen "without his robes, without his great wig." There is no mistaking Blake's allusion to this unique event. In the whole span of time his poem might conceivably allude to, the only ermined justice driven out of Westminster was Baron Thurlow.

Sloss and Wallis, it is true, conjectured that "this passage may be a reference to the London riots of . . . 1780, when the mob . . . burned Lord Mansfield's house." But this was poor guesswork. A simple check discloses that Mansfield's house was nowhere near Westminster or Great George Street or any park and that none of the fires of 1780 was in Westminster.⁶ This guess, missing the date by twelve years, demonstrates both the haphazard nature of Blake research when it has been a matter of seeking him in the material world and the sort of misleading commentary that still hedges Blake's historical clues from sight.

Much more is at stake, of course, than the right reading of a few historical allusions. Only when the central historical theme of *Europe* is cleared of misconceptions can we bring into focus the symbolism of the "Preludium" and of the mythological framework that encloses the central narrative, and only then can we see and properly appreciate the subtle use of Miltonic allusions there—and the architectural brilliance of the whole poem. But these are not matters for a hasty exposition.

In my book [*Blake: Prophet Against Empire* (Princeton, 1954; 3rd ed., 1975)] I show that a similar bringing into focus is possible for Blake's three epics, *The Four Zoas*, *Milton*, and *Jerusalem*, although these are not dated prophecies of the same sort as *America* and *Europe*.

II

I have been dwelling on the importance of the historical approach, and thus far my examples have been largely in the category of "light from without." For the rest of my time I want to talk about a method of reading Blake's "Visionary or Imaginative" language for clues or "Ulro Visions" which he himself supplies—for visions, that is, of the ultimate material starting-points of his visions. This method may be described as the reduction of Blake's fourfold vision to single vision. This is what I do when I say Rintrah "is" William Pitt, or Albion "is" the people of England. It is what Blake does when he says, "Luvah is France." So long as we recognize that we are dealing with only one side of Blake's fourfold, it is legitimate to do this—especially since the other sides are incomplete without this one, which is the ballast that keeps his balloon navigable.

I am well aware that Blake, in his impatience with people who would see only with the eye and attend only to the ballast and not the

flight, asserted "for My Self that I do not behold the outward Creation & that to me it is hindrance . . . it is as the dirt upon my feet." But to a detective or "Watch Fiend" like the historical scholar, the dirt upon Blake's feet is a good clue: it tells us where he has been walking. (Most of it upon Blake's feet is that gray clay known locally as "London stone.") You are familiar with the rest of the passage:

"When the Sun rises, do you not see a round disk of fire somewhat like a Guinea?" O no, no, I see an Innumerable company of the heavenly host crying, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God Almighty!" I question not my Corporeal . . . Eye. . . . I look thro' it & not with it.

Read backward, as I am suggesting for purposes of orientation, Blake's vision of an innumerable company singing Holy Holy "is" a sunrise.

When Blake writes to Flaxman, "The kingdoms of this World are now become the Kingdoms of God & His Christ, & we shall reign with him for ever & ever. The reign of Literature & the Arts commences," he is responding to rumors of peace between the kingdoms of France and Britain *just as he responded to the sunrise* (I quote a letter of October, 1801, but he used almost the same language at similar news a year earlier). Toward the end of the same letter he states more simply the hope "that France & England will henceforth be as One Country and their Arts One" and that he can soon go to Paris "to see the Great Works of Art." This simple and profound hope underlies much of the yearning in Blake's prophecies for an end to "the war of swords" or "corporeal war" and a commencement of the time of "intellectual war" when "sweet Science reigns." We impose on ourselves—yes, grossly—if we neglect the connection here between vision and history.

My point about method is that we can often work back from vision to starting-point if we but grant that the vision has a starting-point, is a vision "of" something. To Dr. Trusler, who told Blake "Your Fancy . . . seems to be in the other world, or the World of Spirits," Blake retorted: "I see Every thing I paint In This World, but Everybody does not see alike." Sometimes Blake's way of seeing what he paints is curiously close to the ways of Erasmus Darwin.

Fuseli, introducing Blake's designs to an orthodox audience, called attention to a quality of "taste, simplicity, and elegance" in Blake's "wildness." Miss Miles tells us that the major materials of Blake's language are those of mid-eighteenth-century poetry. And she makes the salutary observation that many of Blake's language habits which may have seemed unique are properly defined as *extensions* of eighteenth-

century practice. With regard to some of the obscurities of Blake's figurative language, I suggest that they will often yield up their literal meanings when we approach them as the product of an exuberant *extension* of eighteenth-century practice in ornamental periphrasis, or Poetic Diction.

Blake enjoyed referring, in a letter, to his wife's ocean bathing as "courting Neptune for an Embrace." In his poems he liked to refer to the ear as "the Gate of the Tongue." And he liked to take away the scaffolding of his conceit, too: he crossed out manuscript readings which made it clear that by the tongue's gate he meant the "auricular nerves." The gate of my tongue is your ear, your "auricular nerves," ultimately your reason; it is not simply what my nerves do that make my speech incoherent, but the effect of the closing up of your inlets of soul. Urizen is your reason, not mine. In *The Four Zoas* a kind of Della Cruscan periphrasis is used in descriptions of battle. An iron gun is a "black bow" which shoots "darts of hail" or "arrows black." A smoking gun is a "cloudy bow." A cavalry charge under cover of artillery fire comes out like this: "Spur, spur your clouds Of death! . . . Now give the charge! bravely obscur'd With darts of wintry hail Again the black bow draw!" The one who fires the first shot is the one who doth "first the black bow draw." When a Zoa and his Emanation are separated by the mischance of war, they do not say, "Farewell for the duration," but "Return, O Wanderer, when the day of Clouds is o'er."

In Blake's day the newspapers still referred to British soldiers as "the sons of Albion," and so does Blake. Often the Sons and Daughters of Albion represent the various institutions and vocations of English men and women. When the Daughters are at their "Needlework" they represent the textile trades. They strip wool ("Jerusalem's curtains") from sheep ("mild demons of the hills"), and the cellars and garrets where they work are "the dungeons of Babylon." When Blake walks about London "among Albion's rocks & precipices" and looks into Albion's "caves of solitude & dark despair," he is walking through the narrow cobbled streets and looking into dark shops and tiny hovels—"the caves of despair & death" in "the interiors of Albion's Bosom." In the neoclassical tradition employed by Darwin, labor is done by gnomes and nymphs. In Blake it is done by demons and spectres. When young men and women enter apprentice slavery or the army, they are "taking the spectral form." Blake the journeyman engraver is the "spectre" of Blake the poet.

For a concentrated exercise in this materialistic method of reading Blake's "emblematic texture," let us study some of the passages in which Blake is looking at himself at work, engraving or etching on polished copper plates with engraving tools or with varnish and nitric acid (aqua fortis). Here the material referents are palpable, and the differences between matter and manner stand out plain.

Blake's best known reference to the etching process, which he employed in all his "Illuminated Printing," is found in *The Marriage of Heaven & Hell*.

On the abyss of the five senses, where a flat sided steep frowns over the present world, I saw a mighty Devil folded in black clouds, hovering on the sides of the rock. With corroding fires he wrote the following sentence now perceived by the minds of men, & read by them on earth.

The abyss into which Blake is looking is the mirrorlike surface of his copper plate. When he focuses on the surface itself, he sees a flat sided rock. When he looks into the mirror world and orients toward *that* as real, then the "present world" is beneath it, and the flat surface is a steep cliff overhanging the present world. The mighty Devil folded in black clouds and hovering on the sides of the rock is the mirror image of Blake in his black suit pouring aqua fortis ("corroding fires") onto the copper to destroy the abyss except where he has written with impermeable ink or varnish.⁷ His sentence, appearing on the plate in reverse, is only perceived by the minds of men when it is printed and reversed back from the abysmal state. The relationship between the mirror image and the direct image symbolizes the relationship between the vision conveyed to "minds" and the physical sentence on the copper. Thus a full understanding of this passage depends on—or begins with—our visualizing the rudiments of the process: once we "see" that, we can proceed to explore the further connotations of "the abyss of the five senses."⁸

For the process of line engraving we may turn to *The Four Zoas*, where we will find a Spectre who "drave his solid rocks before Upon the tide." The tide is the pond-like surface of the plate, upon which the engraving Spectre lodges the bits of copper gouged out by the graver as he pushes it forward with his hand—driving "his solid rocks before Upon the tide." Here again is the abyss which is not an abyss, the apparently solid surface which opens to infinite meaning—represented by an apparently non-solid tide or abyss which supports rocks or a rock.

The pushing of the graver (or etching needle) makes channels for the ink, and since these channels are technically called furrows, the most obvious metaphor is that of plowing. The complaint that the poet's children have been "plow'd and harrow'd" for another's profit is a complaint that Blake's drawings have been engraved (and etched) by Schiavonetti for his profit.⁹ All the plowing mentioned in the prophetic works is not engraving, of course. But sometimes even the direct description of agriculture contains an implied comparison to the poet's own manner of earning his bread.

Wisdom is sold in the desolate market where none come to buy,
And in the wither'd field where the farmer plows for bread in vain.

Blake had English famine years in mind when he wrote this. But he had also recently plowed for bread in vain, metaphorically, in the sense that he had engraved forty-three plates for an edition of Young's *Night Thoughts* which none had come to buy.

But let us turn to a passage where the focus is, both literally and metaphorically, on the plowing which is engraving. Here the "weeping" of "clods" in "the plowed furrow" suggests that Blake, like his fellow craftsmen, is resorting to "the engraver's best auxiliary, aquafortis,"¹⁰ which makes the bits of copper dissolve. And the "many" who speak are, according to the context, the multiple eyes of God, that is, of Blake's imagination. "Many conversed on these things as they labour'd at the furrows," says Blake, meaning that many ideas occurred to him as his eyes and imagination attended to the lines he was engraving.

The passage I have begun to quote, *Jerusalem* 55, contains another reminder that these material aspects of Blake's meaning are but the dirt on his feet, or, as he puts it here, but

as the moss upon the tree, or *dust upon the plow*,
Or as the sweat upon the labouring shoulder, or as the chaff
Of the wheat-floor or as the dregs of the sweet wine-press.
Such are these Ulro Visions: for tho' we sit down

—"we" are the Eyes speaking about themselves, "the Human Organs" who can at will contract "into Worms or Expand . . . into Gods,"—

for tho' we sit down within
The plowed furrow, list'ning to the weeping clods till we

Contract or Expand Space at will; or if we raise ourselves
Upon the chariots of the morning, Contracting or Expanding Time,
Every one knows, we are One Family, One Man blessed for ever.

Blake is speaking about the unity of life in the Imagination which denies the limitations and divisions accepted by the eyes that see only matter. But our concern at the moment is with the dust and the sweat. What the eyes say is this: We may focus on the furrow being engraved, until we look through that and see a world in a grain of copper; or we may look out the window and in imagination follow the sun ("raise ourselves Upon the chariots of the morning") until we see past, present, and future Time. In that way we see the unity of all space and all time.

Through the wrong end of the telescope we (I mean you and I, now) can see William Blake, sweating at "the meer drudgery" of engraving, and accomplishing "not one half of what I intend, because my Abstract folly hurries me often away while I am at work."

The difference between engraving and relief etching, we must understand, represented the difference between the hack work Blake had to do for a living and the prophetic work he did "to lay up treasures in heaven" and as a soldier of the imagination. His Spectre did most of the plowing and could boast that his labor was necessary to put a world "underneath the feet of Los" and bring a smile of hope to "his dolorous shadow" of a wife. Many a time, declared the surly Spectre, his engraving kept them all from "rotting upon the Rocks" and put "spungy marrow" into the prophet's "splinter'd bones." Yet Blake longed to rise above the "meer drudgery" of engraving, longed to escape this Spectre's power and cast him "into the Lake," perhaps into the very tide upon which he drave his solid rocks.

The writing and etching of his own poems, on the other hand, was done by Los, bard and prophet, "without Fatigue." With corrosive fires he burnt apparent surfaces away to reveal the "eternal lineaments" of truth.¹¹ Or he would "pour aqua fortis on the Name of the Wicked & turn it into an Ornament & an Example." Or, in his favorite imagery, he would forge "under his heavy hand the hours, The days & years" of Tyranny, and thus bind the wicked "in chains of iron."

This shift of image from etcher to blacksmith, from worker with acid on copper to worker with iron and steel in fire, was essential for the connotations of cosmic bardic power. In "The Tyger" Blake could scarcely have written: What the hand dare seize the acid-bottle? An

engraver's shop did have a small anvil for leveling, and a hand-bellows for drying, copper plates. But the blacksmith's mighty hammer, anvil, tongs, chain, and furnaces of intellectual war were far more effectual equipment for a bard in competition with the dark Satanic mills which were producing "ramm'd combustibles" and "molten metals cast in hollow globes, & bored Tubes in petrific steel" (Wilkinson's new process for making cannon barrels was to bore them from solid cast steel). There was also the emotional identification with the working artisan rather than with the more isolated intellectual worker, who might talk about books and pen and paper. Los, as blacksmith, could quite legitimately "wipe the sweat from his red brow." Ultimately Blake pictured him as assisted by a thousand laboring sons, because Blake knew that a multitude of furnaces and fellow laborers, a whole intellectual movement, would be needed to build the new Jerusalem, when free men, "Young Men of the New Age," inherited "the Ruin'd Furnaces of Urizen."

Another strong symbol of effective energy is the printing press, especially in its apocalyptic analogue, the human wine press "call'd War on Earth." The figure of the printer, however, does not compare in power to that of the blacksmith. In the preface to *Jerusalem* Blake prays in humble fashion that his own "types" shall not be "vain." But only once, in *Milton*, is the press of Los specifically called a "Printing-Press," and even there our attention is quickly shifted to a fiercer image. As the poet "lays his words in order above the mortal brain," his types are compared to the steel teeth of a cogwheel which "turn the cogs of the adverse wheel."

At one point in *Jerusalem* Blake does speak of the publication of paper books, when he refers to the pages of a pamphlet against war as "leaves of the Tree of Life." But here he is referring, not to his own fire-seared labors, which he expects to have read only by "future generations," but to the milder and more ephemeral publications of men "scarcely articulate."

In the passage I refer to (*Jerusalem* 45-46), a considerable speech or sermon by someone called "Bath" is spoken of as a sheaf of pages and handed to someone called "Oxford, immortal Bard" with a request that Oxford write an introduction to the public—or so I interpret the following: "Oxford, take thou these leaves of the Tree of Life; with eloquence That thy immortal tongue inspires, present them to Albion: Perhaps he may receive them, offer'd from thy loved hands." Here is a pretty concrete situation, and it ought certainly to yield up its literal

meaning to an assiduous Watch Fiend. Both prongs of our historical method must be employed. On the one hand we must establish the historical context of *Jerusalem* by pinning down various kinds of internal evidence. This I have done fairly thoroughly and have found that *Jerusalem* deals with the latter phase of the Napoleonic wars and that the poem's central prophetic theme is a plea to Albion and his Sons not to pursue the war with France to mutual ruin or to make a vengeful peace that would destroy the freedom and national brotherhood of the two nations. On the eve of Waterloo the latter probability weighs on Blake's mind: "What can I do to hinder the Sons of Albion from taking vengeance? or how shall I them perswade?" In the earlier speech by Bath, he fears for Albion's own destruction.

We must on the other hand examine Blake's hyperbole to see what kind of literal statement the eloquence of Bath and Oxford can be reduced to. Translated into ordinary language, Bath's speech is an anti-war tract addressed to the people of England ("O Albion") alluding to the abolition of the slave trade, a Parliamentary measure enacted in 1807, and inveighing against imperial selfhood or British national pride: "however high Our palaces and cities and however fruitful are our fields, In Selfhood we are nothing." The remark that Bath speaks "in midst of Poetic Fervor" suggests that the author of the tract has been currently engaged in writing verse, and the statement that Bath is one who "first assimilated with Luvah in Albion's mountains" means, within the framework of date and theme established for *Jerusalem*, that he was one of the first British intellectuals to preach peace with France in the present period, that is, since the renewal of war in 1803.

Armed with these clues, my assistant, Martin Nurmi, soon found the preacher-poet of Bath by looking into a bibliography of works written in that city. In 1808, shortly after the passage of the Abolition Bill, the Reverend Richard Warner published *A Letter to the People of England: on Petitioning the Throne for the Restoration of Peace*. In the same year he published such evidence of "Poetic Fervor" as *Bath Characters* and *Rebellion in Bath, an Heroico-Odico-Tragico-Comico Poem*. As for Warner's being one who "first assimilated with Luvah," in 1804 he startled Bath and London with the publication of a fast-day sermon entitled *War Inconsistent with Christianity*, which advocated that Englishmen refuse to bear arms even in case of an invasion by Napoleon. Reviewed widely and heatedly, Warner's sermon went into four editions within a few months and continued to be reissued throughout the war. In *Bath Characters* Warner caricatures himself thus:

BLAKE: THE HISTORICAL APPROACH

Dick preaches foul DEMOCRACY;
And forces luckless loyal sinners,
To hear his rant, and spoil their dinners

—or so his foes say. But “On the *broad basis*” he’ll rely “Of GENUINE CHRISTIANITY.”

“Stripped of its Oriental dress,” says Warner in his Fast Sermon, “the declaration of CHRIST may fairly be taken as a direct and unequivocal reprehension of hostile violence, both in individuals and states.” “However brilliant the successes are with which their arms shall be crowned; whatever acquisitions of territory conquest may unite to their ancient empire . . . WAR is the GREATEST CURSE with which a nation can be afflicted, and . . . all its imaginary present advantages, or future contingent benefits, are but as ‘dust in the balance,’ and as ‘chaff before the wind.’” Warner’s sentiments are undoubtedly those of Blake’s “voice of Bath.”

In his 1808 *Letter to the People* Warner’s alarm that the “national spirit . . . is graduating into a spirit of lawless ambition, and aggressive violence” parallels Bath’s concern lest Albion should “slay Jerusalem in his fearful jealousy,” and on the other hand his warning, “Be *expeditious* . . . lest the concluding scene of the war be performed upon your own shores; lest [Britain’s] peaceful plains exhibit those horrors which the nations of the continent have so long and so largely experienced,” suggests the tenor of Bath’s urgency: “his [Albion’s] death is coming apace . . . for alas, we none can know How soon his lot [the lot of Jesus or of Luvah-France] may be our own.”

None of the Warner pamphlets I have seen discusses the slave trade, although in the *Letter* a passing reference to the “deliverers of Africa, the friends of the poor,” may have been enough to prompt Bath’s lines. Nor have I yet encountered—though I do not despair of doing so¹²—any of Warner’s “leaves” with an introduction by an Oxford poet saying, “In mild perswasion,” something like this:

Thou art in Error, Albion, [in] the Land of Ulro. . . .
Reason not on both sides. Repose upon our bosoms.

NOTES

1. To be exact, Blake was occupied with other work for Butts when he wrote this letter; the miniature of Mrs. Butts was his chore the following year.

2. F. W. Bateson (*Selected Poems of William Blake* [London 1957], p. 127) reads: "In every execration or curse (*not* in every prohibition)." But this is to rely on a meaning for which the *O.E.D.* depends rather heavily on its reading of this line in Blake. Blake may be punning on two meanings of "ban" but the context of forged manacles suggests the meaning (literal and figurative) of governmental or ecclesiastical proclamation or prohibitory edict, illustrated in *O.E.D.* from *Paradise Lost* and Coleridge's *Friend and Burke* (in 1790 against Paine).

3. According to Linnell, by the way, Blake had an explanation from "some public man—ambassador, or something of the sort, that the Bonaparte of Italy was killed, and that another was somehow substituted from the exigent want of the name, who was the Bonaparte of the Empire." Gilchrist, p. 327. It is not clear whether Linnell or some other friend of Blake is being quoted.

4. See Josephine Miles, "The Language of William Blake," *English Institute Essays*: 1950, pp. 141–169. Revised as Chapter 5 of *Eras & Modes in English Poetry* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1957).

5. Here, too, is a key to Blake's emphasis in *Europe* on the cruelty of queens, pre-eminently the cruelty of the Queen of Heaven, who desires "That Woman, lovely Woman, may have dominion" through the code of "Sin," and who regards Rintrah (Pitt) as her knight-errant.

6. Paul Miner (in 1974) has discovered that Thurlow actually resided in Great George Street. For the identification of the top figure pictured on the second page of the *Europe* Preludium as Thurlow clutching his wig as it changes into his natural hair, with his recovery of freedom, see Erdman, *The Illuminated Blake* (1974), pp. 160–62.

7. In conventional intaglio etching the plate would be covered with a blackened ground, but for his relief etching Blake worked directly on the polished surface.

8. I say the rudiments of the process. Notice that Blake keeps secret his actual method of getting words onto the plate. See Ruthven Todd, "The Techniques of Blake's Illuminated Printing," *Print* (1948). In his illumination of this page, Blake shows the letters of his text for the next page being cut into the side of a cliff, in reverse, by a sharp knife of lightning that shoots horizontally from a breasted cloud. For comment see *The Illuminated Blake*, pp. 103–4, 112.

9. Schiavonetti's "etchings" for *The Grave* combined intaglio etching and

engraving, while much "line engraving," including Blake's journeywork, employed intaglio etching for foliage and background.

10. Some people "imagine that the curves, lines, hatchings . . . in a line engraving are produced by a slow and laborious operation . . . but the hard manual work involved in the production of the furrows or ditches in the metal, has been almost entirely superseded, since the days of Albert Dürer . . . by the use of the engraver's best auxiliary, aquafortis." Andrew Tuer, *Bartolozzi and His Works*, I, 80.

11. I suppose we may look upon Blake's reading of the Bible in the infernal sense as a heretical blossom of that medieval exegetical tradition according to which, as D. W. Robertson has pointed out, the aim of the wise man is to cut away the *cortex or integumentum* and reveal the nucleus of inner meaning. The tradition reaches Blake, of course, by way of the Protestant mystics and euhemerist antiquaries.

12. I have still (in 1975) not found a pamphlet introduced by "Oxford"; perhaps Blake's friend "Edward, the bard of Oxford" was simply handing out copies of Warner's pamphlet with appropriate verbal comment.

ROBERT F. GLECKNER

Point of View and Context in Blake's Songs

A flower was offered to me;
Such a flower as May never bore.
But I said I've a Pretty Rose-tree,
And I passed the sweet flower o'er.

Then I went to my Pretty Rose-tree:
To tend her by day and by night.
But my Rose turn'd away with jealousy:
And her thorns were my only delight.

JOSEPH WICKSTEED, the only critic to devote an entire book to Blake's songs, said this about Blake's poem, *My Pretty Rose Tree*: it 'shows how virtue itself is rewarded only by suspicion and unkindness.' And Thomas Wright, Blake's early biographer, commented on the poem as follows: "My Pretty Rose Tree," Blake's nearest approach to humour, may be paraphrased thus: "I was much taken with a charming flower (girl), but I said to myself, No, it won't do. Besides, I have an equally pretty wife at home. Then, too, what would the world say? On the whole it would be policy to behave myself." But his wife takes umbrage all the same. The thorns of her jealousy, however, instead of wounding him give him pleasure, for they excuse his inclination for the flower. Moral: See what comes of being good!

On the contrary, the moral is that such off-the-mark commentary is

From *Bulletin of The New York Public Library*, LXI (1957), pp. 531-6. Reprinted by permission of the publisher and author. This material also appears in slightly different form in *The Piper and the Bard* by Robert F. Gleckner (1959), Wayne State University Press.

what comes of ignoring the context of Blake's songs (that is, whether the poem is a song of innocence or song of experience) and the point of view from which a given poem is written. *My Pretty Rose Tree* is not about virtue perversely rewarded, nor does it have to do with 'policy' or morality in the ordinary sense of those words. Virtue by itself meant nothing to Blake unless clarified by context: in the state of innocence it is *The Divine Image*; in experience it is perverted to *A Divine Image* and *The Human Abstract*. Real virtue Blake defined in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: 'No virtue can exist without breaking these ten commandments. Jesus was all virtue, and acted from impulse, not from rules.' In *My Pretty Rose Tree* the speaker acts from rules when he refuses the offer of the sweet flower. For, as Blake wrote elsewhere,

He who binds to himself a joy
Does the winged life destroy;
But he who kisses the joy as it flies
Lives in eternity's sun rise.

The speaker in *My Pretty Rose Tree* not only has let the moment go, but also has bound to himself a joy. Furthermore, since this is a *Song of Experience*, about the state of experience, the flower offered the speaker is the opportunity for a joy, a love, an ascent to a higher innocence. We recall that it was not just *any* flower, but a superb one, 'such a flower as May never bore.' Still, the offer is refused—because the speaker already has a rose-tree. Now, conventionally, this is admirable fidelity; for Blake, however, it is enslavement by what he called the marriage ring. The speaker thus passes up the chance of a spiritual joy (sweet flower) to return to the limited joy of an earthly relationship (pretty rose-tree). He is sorely tempted—but his desire has fallen subject to an extrasensual force symbolized by the existence of, and his relationship to, the rose-tree.

The result, of course, is the speaker's retreat from desire to the only substitute for desire in Urizen's world of experience, duty:

Then I went to my Pretty Rose-tree
To tend her by day and by night.

The last two lines of the poem are the crushing commentary on the whole affair. Virtuous in terms of conventional morality, the speaker is rewarded with disdain and jealousy, ironically the same reaction which

would have been forthcoming had the speaker taken the offered flower. It is Blake's trenchant way of showing the 'rules' to be inane.

How easily, then, in reading Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* we can ignore Blake's own individual method. Basically that method is simple, its roots lying in his concept of states and their symbols. Like many other artists Blake employed a central group of related symbols to form a dominant symbolic pattern; his are the child, the father, and Christ, representing the states of innocence, experience, and a higher innocence. These *major* symbols provide the context for all the 'minor,' contributory symbols in the songs; and my purpose here is to suggest a method of approach that is applicable to all of them—and thus to all the songs.

Each of Blake's two song series (or states or major symbols) comprises a number of smaller units (or states or symbols), so that the relationship of each unit to the series as a whole might be stated as a kind of progression: from the states of innocence and experience to the *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*, to each individual song within the series, to the symbols within each song, to the words that give the symbols their existence. Conceivably ignorance of or indifference to one word prohibits the imaginative perception and understanding of the whole structure. As Blake wrote in the preface to *Jerusalem*, 'Every word and every letter is studied and put into its fit place; the terrific numbers are reserved for the terrific parts, the mild and gentle for the mild and gentle parts, and the prosaic for inferior parts; all are necessary to each other.'

For the serious reader of Blake's songs, then, a constant awareness of the context or state in which a poem appears is indispensable; and since each state is made up of many poems, the other poems in that state must be consulted to grasp the full significance of any one poem. Each song out of its context means a great deal less than Blake expected of his total invention, and occasionally it may be taken to mean something quite different from what he intended. Blake created a system of which innocence and experience are vital parts; to deny to the *Songs of Innocence*, then, the very background and basic symbology which it helps to make up is as wrong as reading *The Rape of the Lock* without reference to the epic tradition. Without the system, Blake is the simplest of lyric poets and every child may joy to hear the songs. Yet with very little study the child of innocence can be seen to be radically different from the child of experience, and the mother of innocence scarcely

recognizable in experience. The states are separate, the two contrary states of the human soul, and the songs were written not merely for our enjoyment, or even for our edification, but for our salvation.

Closely related to the necessity of reading each song in terms of its state is the vital importance of point of view. Often it is unobtrusive, but many times upon a correct determination of speaker and perspective depends a faithful interpretation of the poem. Blake himself suggests this by his organization of the songs into series, *Innocence* introduced and sung by the piper, *Experience* by the Bard. Superficially there seems to be little to distinguish one from the other since the piper clearly exhibits imaginative vision and the Bard 'Present, Past, & Future sees.' Yet for each, the past, present, and future are different: for the piper the past can only be the primal unity, for the present is innocence and the immediate future is experience; for the Bard the past is innocence, the present experience, the future a higher innocence. It is natural, then, that the piper's point of view is prevailingly happy; he is conscious of the child's essential divinity and assured of his present protection. But into that joyous context the elements of experience constantly insinuate themselves so that the note of sorrow is never completely absent from the piper's pipe. In experience, on the other hand, the Bard's voice is solemn and more deeply resonant, for the high-pitched joy of innocence is now only a memory. Within this gloom, though, lies the ember which can leap into flame at any moment to light the way to the higher innocence. Yet despite this difference in direction of their vision, both singers are imaginative, are what Blake called the poetic or prophetic character. And though one singer uses 'mild and gentle numbers' and the other more 'terrific' tones, both see the imaginative (and symbolic) significance of all the activity in the songs. The inexplicit, Blake said, 'rouzes the faculties to act.' The reader of Blake, then, must rouse his faculties to consider this imaginative point of view always no matter who is speaking or seeing or acting in a poem.

Both singers are of course William Blake. And since he, or they, sing all the songs, whether they are identifiable or not with a character in a poem contributes most importantly to the total meaning of the poem. To take an extreme example, in *The Little Vagabond of Songs of Experience* there are four points of view: that of the mother, who is now out of her element and can no longer protect her child as she did in *Songs of Innocence*; that of the parson, who is a part of the major symbol of experience, father-priest-king; that of the vagabond himself, a child of experience, not the carefree, irresponsible, thoughtless child of

innocence; and that of the Bard, through whose vision each of the other points of view can be studied and evaluated. Without an awareness of this complexity in *The Little Vagabond* the poem dissipates into sentimental drivel. Another good example is *Holy Thursday* of *Songs of Innocence*:

'Twas on a Holy Thursday, their innocent faces clean,
The children walking two and two, in red and blue and green,
Grey-headed beadles walk'd before, with wands as white as snow,
Till into the high dome of Paul's they like 'Thames' waters flow.

O what a multitude they seem'd, these flowers of London town!
Seated in companies they sit with radiance all their own.
The hum of multitudes was there, but multitudes of lambs,
Thousands of little boys and girls raising their innocent hands.

Now like a mighty wind they raise to heaven the voice of song,
Or like harmonious thunderings the seats of Heavens among.
Beneath them sit the aged men, wise guardians of the poor;
Then cherish pity, lest you drive an angel from your door.

From a conventional point of view it is thoughtful and kind of the 'wise guardians of the poor' to run charity schools and to take the children occasionally to St. Paul's to give thanks for all their so-called blessings. But from the piper's point of view (and Blake's of course) the children clearly are disciplined, regimented, marched in formation to church in the uniforms of their respective schools—mainly to advertise the charitable souls of their supposed guardians. The point here (seen only through the piper's vision) is that in the state of innocence there is, or ought to be, no discipline, no regimentation, no marching, no uniforms, and no guardians—merely free, uninhibited, irresponsible, thoughtless play on the echoing green. Accordingly the children in *Holy Thursday* assert and preserve their essential innocence, not by going to church, but by freely and spontaneously, 'like a mighty wind,' raising to 'heaven the voice of song.' This simple act raises them to a level far above their supposed benefactors, who are without vision, without innocence, without love: 'Beneath them sit the aged men, wise guardians of the poor.' The irony is severe, but lost upon us unless we are aware of context and point of view.

As a final example consider the *Introduction* of *Songs of Experience*:

Hear the voice of the Bard!
Who Present, Past, and Future, sees;

Whose ears have heard
 The Holy Word
 That walk'd among the ancient trees,
 Calling the lapsed Soul,
 And weeping in the evening dew;
 That might control
 The starry pole,
 And fallen, fallen light renew!
 'O Earth, O Earth, return!
 'Arise from out the dewy grass;
 'Night is worn,
 'And the morn
 'Rises from the slumberous mass.
 'Turn away no more;
 'Why wilt thou turn away?
 'The starry floor,
 'The wat'ry shore,
 'Is giv'n thee till the break of day.'

The main difficulty here seems to be Blake's chaotic punctuation and the ambiguity it causes. Stanzas 1, 3, and 4 seem to be an invitation to Earth to arise from the evil darkness and reassume the light of its prelapsarian state. Such an orthodox Christian reading, however, is possible only if we forget (1) that this is a *Song of Experience*, and (2) that the singer of these songs is Bard, not God or a priest. In similar fashion, while ignoring the context or the point of view, one might quickly point out the obvious reference in stanza 1 to Genesis iii and forget that the speaker in that chapter is the old Testament God, Jehovah, the cruel law-giver and vengeful tyrant who became in Blake's cosmos the father-priest-king image. And finally, the Holy word in Genesis walked in the garden not in the 'evening dew' but in the 'cool of day,' not to weep and forgive but to cast out and curse his children, to bind them to the soil, and to place woman in a position of virtual servitude to man. In view of this, if the second stanza is read as a clause modifying 'Holy Word,' it is either hopelessly contradictory or devastatingly ironic.

Blake himself hints at the correct reading immediately by means of the ambiguity of the first stanza. There are actually two voices in the poem, the Bard's ('Hear the voice of the Bard'), and the Holy-Word's ('Calling the lapsed Soul'); and the second stanza, *because* of its apparently chaotic punctuation, must be read as modifying both voices. The last two stanzas are the words of *both* voices, perfectly in context

when the dual purpose of the poem is recognized. Only in this way can the poem be seen for what it is, an introduction to the state and the songs of experience, in which the Holy Word of Jehovah is hypocritical, selfish, and jealous, thinking and acting in terms of the physical phenomena of day and night and the earthly morality of rewards and punishments. The Bard, mortal but prophetically imaginative, thinks and acts by eternal time and according to eternal values.

But how does one discover the all-important point of view in Blake's songs? One way is to observe the reactions of various characters to the same symbolic act, object, or character, for both the characters and the symbols ultimately resolve themselves into aspects of the major symbol governing that particular poem. Thus the mother of *Songs of Innocence* is symbolic in that her protection of the child contributes to the over-all picture of the child as major symbol of the state of innocence. In addition, many of Blake's symbols are recurrent, so that once a symbol's basic significance is revealed in a kind of archetypal context, each successive context adds association to association within the song series. When the beadle's wand appears in the first stanza of *Holy Thursday of Innocence*, for example, its immediate connotation is authority. But since a *beadle* wields the symbol, it is also religious authority, the organized church, institutionalized religion. It also represents an act of restraint which forces the children to act according to rule rather than impulse. The Wand is 'white as snow' to suggest the frigidity of man-made moral purity as opposed to the warmth of young, energetic, exuberant innocence. And finally, it suggests the worldly, non-innocent concept of duty (and its corollary, harm), the duty of worship which clashes with all of Blake's ideas of freedom and spontaneity. But all of this, it will be said, strongly suggests the world of experience, and *Holy Thursday* is a *Song of Innocence*; the over-all point of view is the piper's. The point to be made here is simply this. If we do not read the poem as a *Song of Innocence*, about the *state* of innocence and its major symbol, the joyous child, we *can* read it as a rather pleasant picture of nicely dressed charity children being led to church by a gentle beadle to sing hymns; or as a terrible view of unfortunate, exploited charity children under the thumbs of their elders. And we would *not* see that despite outward appearance the children *are* innocent, essentially free and happy, as they spontaneously sing their songs. Without an awareness of context the symbols do not work as Blake intended them to, and the song becomes a fairly inconsequential bit of sentimental social comment.

Considering, then, the care Blake took with point of view, recurring symbols, and symbolic action, we can see that gradually many of Blake's characters merge. The final products of these mergers are what I have called the major symbols. Kindred points of view tend to unite the holders of these points of view; characters who are associated continually with the same or similar symbols tend to melt into one another; and a similar pattern of action reveals a fundamental affinity among the actors. In these ways the significance and value of any one character in any one song are intensified and expanded beyond the immediate context. The physical identity may shift, but the symbolic value remains constant—or better, is constantly enriched. When the beadle's wand in *Holy Thursday* is recognized as part of the basic sceptre motif, the beadle's identity, while being retained as representative of church law, merges with that of Tiriel, say, and the father—and ultimately with the 'selfish father of men' in *Earth's Answer*, the pebble in *The Clod and the Pebble*, the 'cold and usurous hand' of *Holy Thursday*, God in *The Chimney Sweeper*, the mother, parson, and 'Dame Lurch' in *The Little Vagabond*, 'Cruelty,' 'Humility,' and the 'Human Brain' in *The Human Abstract*, and Tirzah in *To Tirzah*. Within the identity are inherent all the other identities which combine to make up the major symbol of the context. The priests of *The Garden of Love* may bind with briars love and desire, but they do so because they are selfish, fatherly, cold and usurous, worldly, cruel, humble, hypocritical, and so forth.

One serious question remains: how does one distinguish among all these characters, or are they all precisely alike and hence redundant? Professor Mark Schorer answers the question this way—I know of none better: 'The point is,' he says, 'that the individuality of these creations lies not in their rich diversity but in the outline that separates them from their backgrounds.' That is, each individual identity in its specific context is at once a part of the whole context and the whole of which it is a part. Both the priest of *The Garden of Love* and the flower in *My Pretty Rose Tree* are self-sufficient for some understanding of these two poems. Blake simply asked his reader to do more than merely understand: that he said, is a 'corporeal' function. He wanted them to imagine as he imagined, to see as he saw, even to recreate as he created. Only then does his method make sense, only then can one see the minor symbols as parts of a major symbol, only then can the individual song take its rightful place as a *Song of Innocence* or *Song of Experience*.

Blake's Apocalypse: *Jerusalem*

The Strong Man represents the human sublime. The Beautiful Man represents the human pathetic, which was in the wars of Eden divided into male and female. The Ugly Man represents the human reason. They were originally one man, who was fourfold; he was self-divided, and his real humanity slain on the stems of generation, and the form of the fourth was like the Son of God. How he became divided is a subject of great sublimity and pathos. The Artist has written it under inspiration, and will, if God please, publish it; it is voluminous, and contains the ancient history of Britain, and the world of Satan and of Adam.

BLAKE, describing his painting
"The Ancient Britons"

JERUSALEM IS THAT voluminous work, a poem in one hundred engraved plates and more than four thousand lines. *Jerusalem* is twice as long as its prelude, *Milton*, and very much more difficult, so much so that I will not give a full summary of it. A brief introduction to the poem, with some indication of its structure, and a few appreciations of its splendor, must serve here to round out my description of Blake's poetic achievement.

Jerusalem is subtitled *The Emanation of the Giant Albion*, and begins with an address "To The Public," which divides Blake's potential audience into the categories of "Sheep" and "Goats," a rather less

From *The Visionary Company: A Reading of English Romantic Poetry* (Cornell University Press, 1971, pp. 108-123). © 1961 by Harold Bloom; © 1971 by Cornell University. Reprinted by permission of the author and the publisher.

complimentary division than that in the *Marriage* between "Angels" and "Devils." The date on the title page, 1804, cannot be the date of the poem's completion, and is certainly not that of its engraving, which may be as late as 1818. Probably the writing of the basic text was over by 1809, though Blake may have revised for another decade.

The poem is divided into four chapters, three of which concern a strife of contraries progressing toward a humanizing solution. Chapter 1 presents the contraries of the self-divided giant, Albion, and his fourth component, Los, whose form is now like the Son of God. Chapter 2 opposes the Orc cycle and Los's attempt to achieve a form out of the cycle which shall liberate man. Chapter 3 shows the human vision as represented by Blake's Jesus, conflicting with the natural vision of reality as maintained by Deism. Chapter 4 gives us the final confrontation, in which contraries cease and imaginative truth is set against a culmination of Satanic error. Blake does not carry the poem into apocalypse but stops with the uncovering of all phenomena in their human forms.

The poem opens with both Albion and Blake asleep, but Albion is in the deathly sleep of Ulro, Blake in the creative repose of Beulah. The voice of the Savior awakens Blake, warning him that "a black water accumulates." This is the dark Atlantic, the blood of the fallen Albion, or Atlas, which will vanish in the apocalypse, when there shall be no more sea. Albion, hearing the Savior's voice, "away turns down the valleys dark," rejecting the vision as a "phantom of the over heated brain." Possessed by jealous fears, Albion has hid his Emanation "upon the Thames and Medway, rivers of Beulah." Spenser had pictured a marriage of the Thames and Medway as an image of concord in the natural world, an extension of the state of being described in the married land of the Gardens of Adonis. The hiding of Jerusalem signifies the fall of the Thames and Medway from human to natural status, a collapse of the phenomenal world into the system of nature.

Certain of Blake's major conceptions have evolved into a change in emphasis when we meet them again in *Jerusalem*. The most important concern Los, who in *The Book of Urizen* was as culpable as Urizen himself. In *The Four Zoas*, Los is still deeply immersed in error, but in *Milton* he merges into an identity with Blake and Milton, who are themselves in error but fighting toward truth. In *Jerusalem*, Los is closely involved with Jesus, and the furnaces of inspired art become identical with the machinery of salvation.

In Albion's continued (and willful) fallen condition, all human per-

fections "of mountain & river & city, are small & wither'd & darken'd." Against this shrinking of human lineaments, Blake offers himself as prophet:

Trembling I sit day and night, my friends are astonish'd at me.
 Yet they forgive my wanderings, I rest not from my great task!
 To open the Eternal Worlds, to open the immortal Eyes
 Of Man inwards into the Worlds of Thought: into Eternity
 Ever expanding in the Bosom of God, the Human Imagination
 O Saviour pour upon me thy Spirit of meekness & love:
 Annihilate the Selfhood in me, be thou all my life!
 Guide thou my hand which trembles exceedingly upon the rock
 of ages,
 While I write of the building of Golgonooza, & of the terrors of
 Entuthon:
 Of Hand & Hyle & Coban, of Kwantok, Peachey, Brereton, Slayd
 & Hutton:
 Of the terrible sons & daughters of Albion, and their Generations.
 Scofield! Kox, Kotope and Bowen, revolve most mightily upon
 The Furnace of Los: before the eastern gate bending their fury.
 They war, to destroy the Furnaces, to desolate Golgonooza:
 And to devour the Sleeping Humanity of Albion in rage &
 hunger.

Golgonooza we have met before as the New Jerusalem or City of Eden, a city of redemption like Spenser's Cleopolis or Yeats's Byzantium, or a "Fourfold Spiritual London," in Blake's vocabulary. Entuthon is the wasteland outside the city, at once a garden become a forest and a road to Eternity become a maze, like Spenser's Faery Land in Book I of his romance. Hand and his eleven brothers (down to Bowen) are the sons of Albion, and several fairly congested paragraphs are necessary to introduce their identity and function.

Zechariah the prophet mentions seven "eyes of the Lord, which run to and fro through the whole earth" (4:10). In Blake these Eyes of God become seven Orc cycles, seven attempts by which the God in Man tries to reverse his fall. The first two Eyes, Lucifer and Moloch, are pre-Hebraic, Druidic cycles, leaving behind giant monuments like Stonehenge. The third Blake calls Elohim, and sees as fixing the limit of contraction, or the creation of Adam and Eve. The fourth, Shaddai, is the age of Abraham, in which human sacrifice ends and so the limit of opacity is established: that is, Satan is identified and cast out. The fifth Eye, Pachad, or the "fear" of Isaac, finishes the first twenty

"churches," or epicycles, into which the third, fourth, and fifth cycles are divided. The sixth Eye, that of Jehovah, is the cycle coming to an end in Blake's own time, where the last phase, or twenty-seventh church, is called Luther, the final orthodoxy into which the Protestant Orc aged. The twenty-eighth phase is the seventh Eye, or church of Jesus, the inauguration of which will be the act of apocalypse.

Blake lives toward the end of the sixth Eye whose god, Jehovah-Urizen, made a covenant with Jacob under the name of Israel. We have seen Milton struggling with Urizen on the banks of the Arnon, seeking to abrogate that covenant by molding Urizen into human form. Jacob, or Israel, is Albion, the fallen Man of the sixth Eye of God, and so Albion, like Israel, must have twelve sons. Orc first came in Israel's cycle as Moses, who, Palamabron-like, was caught between a Rintrah (Elijah, the pillar of fire, Los) and a Satan (Aaron, the pillar of cloud, Urizen). Moses yielded to Satan, and so the Jehovah cycle was bound over to natural morality, not the imagination of the prophets. When the Israelite host crossed into Canaan across the Jordan from the East, they accomplished another fall, identical in Blake's myth with the collapse of Atlantis and the isolating of Britain from America. In *Milton*, the Female Will tries to tempt Milton to a similar error in entry, but the renovated poet refuses. The imaginative entrance into Palestine, for Blake, is through Edom from the South, the upper gate of Beulah through which *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* expects the Savior to come.

As Albion-Israel sleeps, the struggle around him is transferred to his sons against Los. Albion's twelve sons are both a human Zodiac (as they worship the Starry Wheels, which they credit Urizen with having created) and an accusing jury, like the one Blake sat before in his treason trial.

Kwantok, Peachey, and Brereton were judges at Blake's ordeal. Kox was a confederate of Scofield, the accusing dragoon. The origin of the other names is shadowy, but this does not matter. Only four of Albion's sons are of importance in the structure of Jerusalem. They are first, Hand, a death principle, probably based on the three Hunt brothers who published the literary review *The Examiner*, which made two hideous attacks upon Blake's work as an artist. Hand is the Satanic Selfhood of Israel's oldest son, Reuben, who is the particular symbol in *Jerusalem* of the natural or vegetative man, separated by Hand from Merlin, his immortal part or imagination. The next two brothers are Hyle (Hayley, or the Greek word for "matter") and Coban (pos-

sibly an anagram for Sir Francis Bacon, who with Newton and Locke is Blake's symbol of fallen reason and its empirical exaltation of nature). Simeon and Levi, the murderous twins, soldier and priest, correspond to Hyle and Coban. Scofield, the cause of Blake's bondage, is a Joseph figure, for he is responsible for Albion's fall as Joseph caused the descent of Israel into Egypt. The first three sons of Albion—Hand, Hyle, and Coban—are a Triple Accuser and represent Reason, Nature, and Mystery respectively.

The poem next introduces the other antagonists of Los and Jerusalem, the sinister Daughters of Albion, whose names are drawn from accounts of early British history, who together form Tirzah, Mother Nature, and Rahab, the Whore of Babylon, who, as the Covering Cherub, blocks our way back into Eden.

With its new personages introduced, the poem turns to intense conflicts. Los hears Jerusalem lamenting for her children, the murderous sons and daughters of Albion. He knows that to save her he must revive Albion, and he can do that only by laboring to turn nature into art. But his Spectre, the selfish ego of Urthona we have met before in *The Four Zoas*, tries to lure Los away from the furnaces, reminding him that Albion's friendship for him has been deceitful. Blake's Spectre is reminding him that he is an unwanted and unheard prophet, rather like Shelley's selfhood turning on him in the fourth stanza of the *Ode to the West Wind*, when the other English prophet of the age is faced by the ordeal of despair. As Shelley rises into life in the great last stanza of the *West Wind*, so Blake-Los denies and subdues his Spectre:

Thou art my Pride & Self-righteousness: I have found thee out:
 Thou art reveal'd before me in all thy magnitude & power
 Thy Uncircumcised pretences to Chastity must be cut in sunder!
 Thy holy wrath & deep deceit cannot avail against me
 Nor shalt thou ever assume the triple-form of Albion's Spectre
 For I am one of the living: dare not to mock my inspired fury
 If thou wast cast forth from my life! if I was dead upon the mountains
 Thou mightest be pitied & lov'd: but now I am living; unless
 Thou abstain ravening I will create an eternal Hell for thee.
 Take thou this Hammer & in patience heave the thundering Bellows
 Take thou these Tongs: strike thou alternate with me: labour obedient.

As Los labors at his furnaces he creates "the Spaces of Erin," the bulwark that the poetic vision sets against the raging Atlantic of Time

and Space (Erin because Ireland is a geographic buffer for England against the Atlantic). The Spectre weeps, but the unmoved Los states the guiding law of Blake's work:

I must Create a System, or be enslav'd by another Man's
I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create.

The Spectre despairs, refusing to believe that the God in Man deserves Los's labors. But even in despair, the divided Blake works on, driven by the visionary will of Los, who compels the Spectre in Blake to work with him:

So spoke the Spectre shudd'ring, & dark tears ran down his shadowy
face

Which Los wiped off, but comfort none could give or beam of hope
Yet ceas'd he not from labouring at the roarings of his Forge
With iron & brass Building Golgonooza in great contendings
Till his Sons & Daughters came forth from the Furnaces
At the sublime Labours for Los, compell'd the invisible Spectre
To labours mighty, with vast strength, with his mighty chains,
In pulsations of time, & extensions of space, like Urns of Beulah
With great labour upon his anvils; & in his ladles the Ore
He lifted, pouring it into the clay ground prepar'd with art;
Striving with Systems to deliver Individuals from those Systems;
That whenever any Spectre began to devour the Dead,
He might feel the pain as if a man gnaw'd his own tender nerves.

The striving with systems liberates the Daughters of Beulah, Blake's Muses, and in the power of that liberation Golgonooza is built. Outside the city is the desolate world of Ulro:

There is the Cave; the Rock; the Tree; the Lake of Udan Adan;
The Forest, and the Marsh, and the Pits of bitumen deadly:
The Rocks of solid fire: The Ice valleys: the Plains
Of burning sand: the rivers, cataract & Lakes of Fire:
The Islands of the fiery Lakes: the Tree of Malice: Revenge:
And black Anxiety; and the Cities of the Salamandrine men:
(But whatever is visible to the Generated Man,
Is a Creation of mercy & love, from the Satanic Void.)
The land of darkness flamed but no light, & no repose:
The land of snows of trembling, & iron hail incessant:
The land of earthquakes: and the land of woven labyrinths:
The land of snares & traps & wheels & pit-falls & fire mills:
The Voids, the Solids, & the land of clouds & regions of waters:

Night and day Los walks round the walls of his city, viewing the fallen state of the Zoas, and the rooting of the twelve sons of Albion into every nation as the Polypus, the undifferentiated mass of vegetative life. As Los looks out at the world through Blake's eyes, he sees Albion cased over by the "iron scourges" of the natural philosophy of Bacon and Newton:

Reasonings like vast Serpents
Infold around my limbs, bruising my minute articulations

All things that he sees acted on Earth have already been created by Los as bright sculptures in the Halls of his city. But these inspired prophecies do not save Jerusalem from being accused of sin by the twelve sons of Albion, and by Vala, Albion's mistress. The fallen giant speaks out of his sleep, accusing himself, and so suffers the fate of Job: "Every boil upon my body is a separate & deadly sin." The first chapter closes with the Daughters of Beulah lamenting Albion's departure from self-forgiveness and the forgiveness of others.

Chapter 2 is addressed "To the Jews," and begins with a lyric that identifies ancient Jerusalem and modern London. Plate 26, just before this lyric, shows Jerusalem, the woman, appalled by Hand the Accuser, who stalks by her, left foot forward, a serpent intertwined in his arms, a dark vision of reason identified with death. Hand is the vision Blake calls upon the Jews to repudiate, that their humility may be liberated from self-righteousness. As the second chapter will concern the attempt to form history into vision, Blake directs it to the Jews whose writings record the struggles between contraries in a nation's spiritual history.

Chapter 2 begins with Albion's acceptance of Urizen as God, under the cold shadows of the Tree of Mystery. After this, he creates a Female Will in Vala, and worships it as well. Reuben now takes Albion's place as the man of ordinary perceptive powers, the Adam who has reached the limit of contraction. As such, Reuben is in the dreadful position of a creature who invents his own unnecessary death and then grows forward toward it, but this perverseness is the pattern of ordinary generative life.

Los makes a series of resolutions to save Albion, and so deliver Reuben over to the Merlin within himself, but Albion is now interested only in justice and righteousness, like a Job's comforter, and will not allow himself to be saved by works of forgiveness. Instead, he orders Hand and Hyle to seize Los to be brought to justice. Los prays for the

"Divine Saviour" to arise "upon the Mountains of Albion as in ancient time," and takes action by entering into Albion to search the tempters out of the giant's Minute Particulars. But he finds every Particular of Albion, every individual component of vision, hardened into grains of sand. Unable to save the degenerated Albion, Los as Savior builds a couch of repose for him to rest upon, the materials of the couch being composed of the books of the Bible. Jerusalem goes into the kind arms of the Daughters of Beulah, to await her lord's awakening. Erin, the spirit of myth-making or individual vision, ends the chapter with a speech of great complexity, addressed to the Daughters in their role as sources of a poet's inspiration. Beginning with a sense of horror at the collapse of Atlantis and the withering away of the human form, she passes to the paradox of fallen vision:

The Visions of Eternity, by reason of narrowed perceptions,
Are become weak Visions of Time & Space, fix'd into furrows
of death;
Till deep dissimulation is the only defence an honest man has
left.

Certainly this is Blake chastising his own life, and lamenting the limits of his existence:

The Eye of Man, a little narrow orb, clos'd up & dark,
Scarcely beholding the Great Light; conversing with the Void:
The Ear, a little shell, in small volutions shutting out
True Harmonies, & comprehending great, as very small:
The Nostrils, bent down to the earth & clos'd with senseless
flesh,
That odours cannot them expand, nor joy on them exult:
The Tongue, a little moisture fills, a little food it cloyes,
A little sound it utters, & its cries are faintly heard.

This is the contrary to Thel's lament over the senses. Yet Erin's speech centers as much on hope as on despair, for

The Lord
Jehovah is before, behind, above, beneath, around.

The work of this Jehovah makes it clear that he is the Jehovah of Blake's Jesus, not of Satan-Urizen, for he shows his forgiveness by "building the Body of Moses in the valley of Peor: the Body of Divine Analogy." We have met this valley where Moses is buried before, in

Milton, for Urizen and Milton struggle there until Urizen puts on the human form and abandons the law of morality with its stone tablets. The fallen body of man is therefore also "the Body of Divine Analogy," made in the image of the unfallen Man-God. Frye sums up the central meaning of *Jerusalem* when he calls this use of analogy a "conception of the world of experience as a parody or inverted form of the imaginative world."¹ Blake's dialectical position in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* depended upon just such a conception of nature and experience. The naturalist or vitalist does not realize that nature can be turned inside out, as it were, without being repudiated, just as the ascetic cannot understand that inverted as nature is, it remains a form, however distorted, of the truth. For Blake, to hold a mirror up to man is to see nature.

Erin closes her speech by vowing to remain as a shield against the Starry Wheels of Albion's sons, while the Daughters of Beulah end the chapter by calling upon the Lamb of God to descend.

That Blake addressed chapter 3 "To the Deists" marks it as the part of the poem which seeks to consolidate error. Deism Blake now defines explicitly as "the Worship of the God of this World," and its morality as "Self-Righteousness, the Selfish Virtues of the Natural Heart."

When the poem begins again we see the grief of the imaginative heart as Los "wept vehemently over Albion." The Eternals elect the Seven Eyes of God, but the Daughters of Albion continue their wild cruelties, while the Sons maintain their battle against the hammer of Los. Urizen creates Druid temples for human sacrifice, while Los goes on with the perpetual work of making his city.

The cycles move on until we reach the story of Joseph and Mary. Blake had little use for any myth of a virgin birth; to him such an event could only occur as a demonic act in Ulro. His mother of Jesus is a Magdalen, like Oothoon. But Joseph is no Theotormon, and Mary becomes a form of Jerusalem:

O Forgiveness & Pity & Compassion! If I were Pure I should never
Have known Thee; If I were Unpolluted I should never have
Glorified thy Holiness, or rejoiced in thy great Salvation.

The larger part of chapter 3 sharpens the opposition between Vala and Jerusalem, Satan and Jesus, until:

The Human form began to be alter'd by the Daughters of Albion
And the perceptions to be dissipated into the Indefinite. Becoming

BLAKE'S APOCALYPSE: JERUSALEM

A mighty Polypus nam'd Albion's Tree: they tie the Veins
And Nerves into two knots: & the Seed into a double knot:
They look forth: the Sun is shrunk: the Heavens are shrunk
Away into the far remote: and the Trees & Mountains wither'd
Into indefinite cloudy shadows in darkness & separation.

This decay of nature is simultaneous with the union of the Daughters of Albion into "Rahab & Tirzah, A Double Female," who torture the human form and inspire their admirers to the sexual aberration of war. The twenty-seven churches now pass into the group of "the Male Females: the Dragon forms," stretching from Abraham to Luther, "and where Luther ends Adam begins again in Eternal Circle." But before the Circle can go round again, prophecy finally succeeds and breaks into history:

But Jesus breaking thro' the Central Zones of Death & Hell
Opens Eternity in Time & Space; triumphant in Mercy

With this event, the third chapter closes. The fourth begins with an address "To the Christians," for Blake is approaching his revelation and

A man's worst enemies are those
Of his own house & family;
And he who makes his law a curse,
By his own law shall surely die.

"Is the Holy Ghost any other than an Intellectual Fountain?" Blake asks, and by that question separates himself from the institutional Christianity of his own day or of any other. A blank-verse introductory poem goes further in separating Jesus from the Wheel of fire that moves religion in his name:

I stood among my valleys of the south
And saw a flame of fire, even as a Wheel
Of fire surrounding all the heavens: it went
From west to east against the current of
Creation and devour'd all things in its loud
Fury & thundering course round heaven & earth
By it the Sun was roll'd into an orb:
By it the Moon faded into a globe,
Travelling thro' the night: for from its dire
And restless fury, Man himself shrunk up

Into a little root a fathom long.
And I asked a Watcher & a Holy-One
Its Name? he answered: It is the Wheel of Religion

Jesus died, according to Blake, because he strove against the current of this Wheel. But as the institutions of religion have subsumed the first visionary, so they begin in our time to subsume Blake also, whose doctrinal orthodoxy has been proclaimed by assorted divines.

The action of chapter 4 begins again with the incessant labors of Los against the Spectres of Albion's Twelve Sons. These have crowned Vala as queen of earth and heaven. Hand and Hyle have been seduced by their Emanations, and only their Satanic Spectres, ghosts of reason and nature, remain to battle Los. Los himself wearies, for he is "the labourer of ages in the Valleys of Despair." Yet he has resolution enough to take Reuben from his wanderings and set him into the Divine Analogy of the six thousand years of Biblical and post-Biblical history. A vision of Jerusalem within Albion revives Los and he returns with fresh courage to his furnaces, but is betrayed into wearying strife again by Enitharmon, who begins to recede into the Female Will.

The remainder of the poem is dominated by a full epiphany of Antichrist and a gradually mounting consciousness of redemption. On the eighty-ninth plate the Antichrist is revealed as "a Human Dragon terrible and bright," who is also Ezekiel's "anointed cherub that covereth," a Leviathan who devours in three nights "the rejected corse of death" that the last Luvah had shed. In the final line of the eighty-ninth plate a Double Female who has mustered multitudes of the fallen becomes absorbed through those multitudes in Antichrist, and so becomes a Satanic One with him.

In reaction to this intensified horror, Los reaches the heights of his prophetic power on the wonderful ninety-first plate, which gathers together the hard-won wisdom of Blake's heroic life:

Go, tell them that the Worship of God, is honouring his gifts
In other men: & loving the greatest men best, each according
To his Genius: which is the Holy Ghost in Man; there is no other
God, than that God who is the intellectual fountain of Humanity;
He who envies or calumniates: which is murder & cruelty,
Murders the Holy-one: Go tell them this & overthrow their cup,
Their bread, their altar-table, their incense & their oath:
Their marriage & their baptism, their burial & consecration:
I have tried to make friends by corporeal gifts but have only

Made enemies: I never made friends but by spiritual gifts;
By severe contentions of friendship & the burning fire of thought.
He who would see the Divinity must see him in his Children,
One first, in friendship & love; then a Divine Family, & in the midst
Jesus will appear; so he who wishes to see a Vision; a perfect Whole
Must see it in its Minute Particulars

Milton had invoked the Holy Spirit as one that preferred "Before all Temples th' upright heart and pure." Now Blake overthrows all that is outward in worship as a distraction from the human. Los, with a tremendous effort, at last subdues his Spectre:

I care not whether a Man is Good or Evil; all that I care
Is whether he is a Wise Man or a Fool. Go! put off Holiness
And put on Intellect: or my thund'rous Hammer shall drive thee
To wrath which thou condemnest: till thou obey my voice

In the furnaces of Los the nations begin to fuse together. Albion revives:

The Breath Divine went forth upon the morning hills, Albion mov'd
Upon the Rock, he open'd his eyelids in pain; in pain he mov'd
His stony members, he saw England. Ah! shall the Dead live again

The Four Zoas go to their apocalyptic tasks: "Urizen to his furrow, & Tharmas to his Sheepfold, and Luvah to his Loom." The integrated Urthona labors at his Anvil, with Los within him "labouring & weeping," for though unwearied, the prophet has labored long, "because he kept the Divine Vision in time of trouble."

Jesus, in "the likeness & similitude of Los," appears before Albion, as the Good Shepherd before "the lost Sheep that he hath found." They converse, "as Man with Man," the dialogical image of mutual confrontation excluding any notion of subject-object experience between them. Jesus has died and must die for Albion, but only the death of the Selfhood. In a clairvoyant moment of humanist affirmation, Blake's Jesus, who is "the likeness & similitude" of Blake as both are of Los, states *Jerusalem's* version of the Atonement: "This is Friendship & Brotherhood: without it Man is Not." Nothing in Blake is finer than those last five words, inevitable in their simplicity.

The Covering Cherub comes on in darkness and overshadows them, and appears to "divide them asunder." Terrified for Jesus, Albion throws himself into Los's furnaces of affliction, seeking to lose himself in saving Jesus, but

All was a Vision, all a Dream: the Furnaces became
Fountains of Living Waters flowing from the Humanity Divine
And all the Cities of Albion rose from their Slumbers, and All
The Sons & Daughters of Albion on soft clouds Waking from Sleep
Soon all around remote the Heavens burnt with flaming fires
And Urizen & Luvah & Tharmas & Urthona arose into
Albion's Bosom: Then Albion stood before Jesus in the Clouds
Of Heaven Fourfold among the Visions of God in Eternity

In this crucial moment, in and out of time, the workshop of the artist has become the Living Waters of Humanity's Intellectual Fountain, and "a pure river of water of life" as well, in reference to the last chapter of Revelation. The lineaments of Man are revealed, and the Four Zoas take their places in a wonderfully active Eden, very unlike Milton's static Heaven:

And they conversed together in Visionary forms dramatic which
bright
Redounded from their Tongues in thunderous majesty, in
Visions
In new Expanses, creating exemplars of Memory and of Intellect
Creating Space, Creating Time according to the wonders Divine
Of Human Imagination, throughout all the Three Regions
immense
Of Childhood, Manhood & Old Age; & the all tremendous
unfathomable Non Ens
Of Death was seen in regenerations terrific or complacent
varying
According to the subject of discourse & every Word & every
Character
Was Human according to the Expansion or Contraction, the
Translucence or
Opakeness of Nervous fibres such was the variation of Time &
Space
Which vary according as the Organs of Perception vary & they
walked
To & fro in Eternity as One Man reflecting each in each &
clearly seen
And seeing: according to fitness & order.

The ninety-ninth plate shows Albion and Jerusalem in a sexual embrace, surrounded by fire on every side. The text is very quiet, and very sure:

BLAKE'S APOCALYPSE: JERUSALEM

All Human Forms identified even Tree Metal Earth & Stone, all
Human Forms identified, living going forth & returning wearied
Into the Planetary lives of Years Months Days & Hours reposing
And then Awakening into his Bosom in the Life of Immortality.

And I heard the Name of their Emanations they are named Jerusalem

In this most definitive of Blake's visions, nothing is excluded. Among the innumerable Chariots of the Almighty appearing in heaven are not only "Milton & Shakspear & Chaucer," but "Bacon & Newton & Locke," for contraries are necessary in Eden. Blake was free even of his own apparent obsessions, for the imagination cannot be obsessed, even as it cannot be contained. "The clearer the organ the more distinct the object," Blake wrote, and the organ of his imagination was the whole man.

NOTES

1. Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* (Princeton University Press, 1947), p. 383.

On Wordsworth and the Locke Tradition

I

THE manner in which the triumph of the mechanical philosophy affected poetry can be illustrated, I think, by comparing a representative serious poem of the earlier eighteenth century, Pope's *Essay on Man*, with *Paradise Lost* as representing the previous century. It has been pointed out that there is no Satan in Pope's poem. From one standpoint this fact merely exemplifies Pope's optimistic 'philosophy.' With the characteristic desire of his time to explain, and to explain favourably, Pope unquestioningly makes his poem a theodicy, a vindication of an order of things in which evil appears, but only appears, to exist. To 'explain' evil is almost necessarily to explain it away. But taking a more general view, one is struck by the absence, in Pope's poem, of any sort of mythological machinery. In giving pointed expression to the real beliefs of his time, Pope instinctively adopts an explanatory method. It would have been unthinkable in Pope's time that a serious poet should have used any such machinery, or even an allegorical convention, for such a purpose. Mythologies, including the Christian, were now felt to be exploded; what may have been 'true' in them is that part which can be conceptually or intellectually stated. Milton, as we have seen, although himself a considerable rationaliser, could still employ the concrete symbols of the faith without feeling that he was deliberately utilising what was fictitious. God and Satan were real beings to him, as well as 'principles.' But though Pope and his contemporaries were debarred by their intellectual climate from using any great system of commonly-accepted

From *The Seventeenth Century Background*, 1950 (Columbia University Press; Chatto & Windus, Ltd., London), pp. 296-309. Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

symbols, as Dante and Milton could, they could still employ mythological material for other purposes, as Pope did in the *Rape of the Lock*, for example. They could use it consciously, for technical convenience and for purposes of 'delight.' It is in this manner that the mythologies of the ancient world are generally used by eighteenth century poets. These poets employ their personifications and their other mythological apparatus in full awareness that they are 'fiction.' They are 'fictions' of proved evocative power and of long association with poetic experience, and they can thus still be made use of to assist in producing poetry out of the dead-matter of modernity. But fictions they are still felt to be, and they cannot therefore be used with full conviction. Their employment involves the deliberate exploitation of obsolete modes of feeling, a conscious disregard of contemporary truth-standards. It was, one may suppose, his sense of this situation which made Johnson dislike *Lycidas* and Gray's *Odes*.

As a consequence of these developments it was inevitable that when a major poet again appeared he should be 'left alone, seeking the visible world.' No existing mythology could express the 'real,' as the 'real' was now felt to be. A final effort had been made, by Erasmus Darwin, to enlist poetry under the banner of science by describing the Loves of the Plants with all the apparatus of 'poetical machinery,' but of this unholy alliance it would be hard to say whether it was more degrading to science or to poetry. The new poet must therefore either make poetry out of the direct dealings of his mind and heart with the visible universe, or he must fabricate a genuine new mythology of his own (not necessarily rejecting all old material in so doing). Keats and Shelley often follow the second of these methods; Wordsworth typically follows the first.

Wordsworth's relation to the 'scientific' tradition is not quite simple. In a sense he is in violent reaction against it, and yet it conditioned much of his poetic experience. What he owed to it was his instinctive repudiation of any concrete mythology. His poetry was 'scientific' in that his interest lay in the free relations between the mind of man and the universe to which, he believes, it is 'so exquisitely fitted.' According to him, we 'build up the being that we are' by 'deeply drinking-in the soul of things.' That is, there must be no abstractions, no symbols, no myths, to stand between the mind and its true object. In so far as it was the abstract world-picture (the world as 'machine') of the seventeenth century natural philosophers which had exploded the mythologies, Wordsworth may be said to have owed to them (as well as to his

own temperament) his root-assumption that truth could only be achieved by 'making verse deal boldly with substantial things.' Wordsworth was the kind of poet who could only have appeared at the end of the eighteenth century, when mythologies were exploded, and a belief in the visible universe as the body of which God was the soul alone remained. In this sense his beliefs can be viewed as data furnished to him by a tradition; in this sense he, as well as Dante, may be said to have employed his sensibility within a framework of received beliefs. But his debt to tradition, unlike Dante's, was a negative one; he owed to it his *deprivation* of mythology, his aloneness with the universe. His more positive beliefs, those by which he appears in reaction against the scientific tradition, were built up by him out of his own poetic experiences, and it is this which makes him representative of the modern situation—the situation in which beliefs are made out of poetry rather than poetry out of beliefs. To animise the 'real' world, the universe of death' that the 'mechanical' system of philosophy had produced, but to do so without either using an exploded mythology or fabricating a new one, this was the special task and mission of Wordsworth. Wordsworth's conviction that the human mind was capable of this task was the most important of his 'positive' beliefs, and this belief he owed chiefly to his own experiences. It is this which distinguishes his 'deism' from that of, for instance, Thomson's *Seasons*, to which it bears an obvious superficial resemblance. For Thomson, as for Pope, mythologies were almost as 'unreal' as for Wordsworth, but their positive belief, their Deism (in so far as they genuinely held it), was 'intellectually' held, and it consequently appears in poetry mainly as rhetoric. The poetry exists to decorate, to render agreeable, a set of abstract notions; and these abstractions have been taken over, as truth, from the natural philosophers—from Descartes, Newton, Locke, or Leibnitz. Wordsworth's beliefs, on the other hand, were largely the formulation of his own dealings with 'substantial things'; they were held intellectually only because they had first been 'proved upon the pulses.' That the result of his 'dealings' was not a *Divine Comedy* or a *Paradise Lost* was due, we may say, to the scientific movement and the sensationalist philosophy of Locke and Hartley; that the result was not an *Essay on Man*, a *Seasons*, or a *Botanic Garden* was due to himself. For it was the 'visible world,' no abstract machine, that Wordsworth sought; and he felt that mechanical materialism had substituted a 'universe of death for that which moves with light and life instinct, actual, divine, and true.'¹ The belief that Wordsworth constructed out of his experiences was a belief in the

capacity of the mind to co-operate with this 'active universe,' to contribute something of its own to it in perceiving it, and not, as sensationism taught, merely to receive, passively, impressions from without. It was this belief, or the experiences upon which the belief was based, which encouraged him to hope that poetry might be delivered from the fetters of the mechanical tradition without being allowed to fall into disrepute as 'unreal' or 'fanciful.'

Of this belief, as intellectually formulated, there are many explicit statements in Wordsworth's poetry, especially in the *Prelude*, as well as in his prose. There is, for example, the passage on the child (the 'inmate of this active universe'):

'For feeling has to him imparted power
That through the growing faculties of sense
Doth like an agent of the one great Mind
Create, creator and receiver both,
Working but in alliance with the works
Which it beholds.'²

In a later passage of the same Book he distinguishes the true creative power from arbitrary fancy:

'A plastic power
Abode with me, a forming hand, at times
Rebellious, acting in a devious mood,
A local spirit of his own, at war
With general tendency, but, for the most,
Subservient strictly to external things
With which it communed.'³

The classic 'locus' is in the Preface to the *Excursion*, where in deliberately Miltonic language he has been claiming more than epic dignity for his own subject-matter: ⁴

'Paradise, and groves
Elysian, Fortunate Fields—*why should they be*
A history only of departed things,
Or a mere fiction of what never was?
For the discerning intellect of Man,
When wedded to this goodly universe
In love and holy passion, shall find these
A simple produce of the common day.
—I, long before the blissful hour arrives,

ENGLISH ROMANTIC POETS

Would chant in lonely peace the spousal verse
Of this great consummation:—and, *by words*
Which speak of nothing more than what we are,
Would I arouse the sensual from their sleep
Of Death, and win the vacant and the vain
To noble raptures; while my voice proclaims
How exquisitely the individual Mind
 to the external World
Is fitted, and how exquisitely too—
Theme this but little heard of among men—
The external World is fitted to the Mind;
And the Creation (by no lower name
Can it be called) *which they with blended might*
Accomplish.'

The famous 'Fancy-Imagination' distinction of Wordsworth and Coleridge, and their followers, may best be understood as arising from the existence in them of the particular 'belief-state' I have tried to indicate. The fact-world of modern scientific consciousness was the primary datum. In this 'inanimate cold world' 'objects, *as* objects, are essentially fixed and dead.'⁵ But just as a 'known and familiar landscape' may be transmuted by moonlight or 'accidents of light and shade,'⁶ so, owing to the bond between nature and the soul of man, this dead world may be brought to life by the modifying colours of the 'imagination.' Of the *imagination*, for this is the faculty which works the required magic without producing what is now felt to be 'fictitious.' Where there is consciousness of fiction, it is the *fancy* that has been at work. The test of the 'imaginative,' as distinct from the 'imaginary,' is that external objects shall have been coloured by the poet's own mood, or made the symbol of it; that the plastic power shall have been exercised, but kept 'subservient strictly to external things.' Modifications *so* wrought, values *so* ascribed to the fact-world, have a reality-status which is unassailable, because they are psychological in origin; they spring, that is, from states of mind, of which the 'reality' cannot be questioned.

Wordsworth's belief in the possibility of this creation which the mind and the universe may 'with blended might accomplish' was, I have suggested, largely built up out of his own poetic experience. One need only consider a number of passages in which Wordsworth has commemorated those of his experiences which he felt to be most significant, to see that they are generally occasions on which he had (for the most part unconsciously at the time) exerted the 'visionary,' the 'plastic' power upon

some external object. In the celebrated 'spots of time' passage at the end of Book XII of the *Prelude*,⁷ he says explicitly that of all the recollections which hold for him a 'renovating virtue,' he values most those which record moments of the greatest self-activity, those which 'give knowledge to what point, and how, the mind is lord and master, outward sense the obedient servant of her will'; recollections, that is, which show the mind 'not prostrate, overborne, as if the mind herself were nothing, a mere pensioner on outward forms—' (as in sensationalist philosophy), but in its native dignity, creating significance in alliance with external things. It is unfortunately true that Wordsworth frequently *discusses* his experiences, and states the results which his intellect has extracted from them, instead of communicating them to us. The modern reader demands the experience, and cares little or nothing what metaphysical or psychological principle they are supposed to exemplify. This criticism is perhaps applicable to the passage in Book XII to which I have referred, for Wordsworth there avows his inability to communicate the 'visionary dreariness' which then invested the moor, the lonely pool, and the woman with the pitcher, although the knowledge that his imagination had been strong enough to impart the visionary quality to the scene was his reason for valuing the recollection. But he has given enough examples of his sensibility in action for us to see that its workings were independent of, and antecedent to, the formulation of the belief. When (to take a few illustrations at random):

'a gentle shock of mild surprise
Has carried far into his heart the voice
Of mountain torrent';⁸

when he saw the Leech-Gatherer pace

'About the weary moors continually,
Wandering about alone and silently';⁹

when the Highland woman's greeting seemed

'a sound
Of something without place or bound';¹⁰

when

'the high spear-grass on that wall
By mist and silent rain-drops silvered o'er,
As once I passed, into my heart conveyed
So still an image of tranquillity,

So calm and still, and looked so beautiful
Among the uneasy thoughts which filled my mind,'¹¹

these experiences, and many another that could be collected from his best poetry, depended upon no special beliefs (and of course no beliefs are needed by the reader in order to share them to the full). It was out of the repetition of these imaginative moments that the belief arose; the belief itself was the intellectual formulation of what they seemed to mean. It must be recognised, nevertheless, that the formulation, once made (no doubt with Coleridge's assistance), gave added importance to the recollected 'moments,' the 'spots of time,' and that Wordsworth would probably not have conducted his *recherche du temps perdu* with such eagerness and such conviction if he had not so formulated it.

II

Wordsworth's poetic activity, then, was largely conditioned by the 'reality-standards' of his time, which left him alone with the visible universe. But his 'creative sensibility' had taught him that he was not alone with an 'inanimate cold world,' but with an 'active universe,' a universe capable of being moulded and modified by the 'plastic power' which abode within himself. As long as he could be a poet, this belief in the bond between man and nature was valid. Poetry becomes, with Wordsworth, the record of moments of 'ennobling interchange of action from within and from without';¹² it takes on, in fine, a *psychological* aspect. 'There is scarcely one of my poems,' Wordsworth wrote to Lady Beaumont, 'which does not aim to direct the attention to some moral sentiment, or to some general principle, or law of thought, or of our intellectual constitution.'¹³

I have emphasised this 'aloneness' of Wordsworth with the universe, because I think it marks his position in the history of 'poetry and beliefs,' and because it seems to determine the quality of much of his work. Centuries of intellectual development had now brought matters to this, that if poetry were still to be made, it must be made by the sheer unaided power of the individual poet. And what was it that he must make? A record of successes; of successful imaginative dealings with the world of eye and ear. And what was to be the criterion of success? That plastic power shall have been exerted upon the 'vulgar forms of every day,' but in such a way that there shall be no departure from 'nature's living images.' The midnight storm may grow darker in presence of the poet's

eye, the visionary dreariness, the consecration, may be spread over sea or land, but the transforming power must work 'subservient strictly to external things'; there must be intensification without distortion. Fact and value were to be combined in this 'fine balance of truth in observing, with the imaginative faculty in modifying, the object observed.' But what sort of 'truth' may be claimed for the creation which world and mind 'with blended might accomplish'?—for, that poetry is 'the most philosophic of all writing,' that 'its object is truth,' is Wordsworth's profound conviction.¹⁴ I suppose the answer would be, 'psychological' truth; that is to say, the poetry is faithfully expressive of certain states of consciousness. Of the two elements of which these states are composed, fact and value, Wordsworth is equally sure of both. He is sure of the fact, because he knows no man has observed it more intently; he is sure of the value, because this was intuitively apprehended in himself, it came from within. He is no less sure of the truth of the resulting creation, because it had been experienced as a modification of his own consciousness. But it was only as long as his mind was dealing thus nakedly with observed fact that Wordsworth could feel this conviction of truthfulness. Any translation of his experience into myth, personification or fable, though not necessarily always culpable, is inevitably a lapse towards a lower level of truth, a fall, in fact, from imagination to fancy. Poetry exists to transform, to make this much-loved earth more lovely; and in former times men could express their sense of fact, without misgiving, in mythologies. But since the coming of the enlightened age this was becoming almost impossible. The efforts of eighteenth century poets to vitalise the dead matter of the Cartesian universe by using the symbols of an outworn mythology had ended in fiasco, and the abandonment of the symbols, at any rate for a time, became a necessity.

But this abandonment threw upon Wordsworth, as it throws still more emphatically upon the contemporary poet, an enormous burden, no less, in fact, than 'the weight of all this unintelligible world.' He must be continually giving proofs of strength in order to maintain his belief that the load *could* be lightened. To keep the vast encompassing world from becoming 'cold and inanimate' by transferring to it a 'human and intellectual life' from the poet's own spirit; to 'dissolve, diffuse, and dissipate in order to re-create'; to 'idealize, and to unify,' to 'shoot one's being through earth, air and sea'—what a stupendous task for the unaided spirit of man! Is it to be wondered at that Wordsworth, after bearing the heavy and the weary weight, Atlas-like, for many years, should at last, like Atlas, have turned into a mountain of stone? Youth, and Cole-

ridge, and Dorothy, and the moonlight of Alfoxden—these could and did lighten the burden for him for a while. But there are many signs that after this his material began to resist him more and more stubbornly. Was there not something in the very nature of the poetic task he had set himself which made this inevitable? 'To spread the tone, the atmosphere, and with it the depth and height of the ideal world around forms, incidents and situations, of which, for the common view, custom had bedimmed all the lustre, had dried up the sparkle and the dew-drops' ¹⁵—this is probably the special prerogative of youth. In youth the imagination poured the modifying colours prodigally over all things, and only when its vitality began to sink did the man discover how much virtue had been going out of him. With the realisation that 'objects as objects, are essentially fixed and dead,' comes the disturbing sense that 'in our life alone does nature live.' That Wordsworth had reached this point at about the age of thirty-five is fairly clear from the passage in Book XII of the *Prelude*, where, echoing Coleridge, he declares

"That from thyself it comes, that thou must give,
Else never canst receive."¹⁶

The whole context from which these words are taken shows also how habitually, by this time, Wordsworth had come to find in *memory* his chief reservoir of strength. Certain memories are the 'hiding-places of man's power'; memories, that is, of former successful exertions of imaginative strength. In the *Prelude* pre-eminently, though elsewhere as well, Wordsworth, now fighting a losing battle with *das Gemeine*, supported his strength for a while by drawing upon the past. But he was living upon capital, and when that was spent, what was to remain?

III

Poetry, as we have since learnt, has other tasks than that of imparting psychological values to the visible world. Had Wordsworth turned his attention towards these, his genius might not have atrophied so soon. It remains to indicate briefly, in conclusion, what gave Wordsworth his initial direction towards 'Nature' as the inevitable raw material for his creative sensibility. Here we meet, I think, with two other groups of beliefs current in his age, which may be said to have conditioned his poetic experience: postulates ('doctrines-felt-as-facts') without which his poetry would not have been what it actually is. The first was the

product of the deistic tradition of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, to which I have already alluded in passing. Ever since the Renaissance the Creation had been steadily gaining in prestige as the 'art of God,' the universal divine Scripture which 'lies expans'd unto the eyes of all.'¹⁷ The emotion of the 'numinous,' formerly associated with super-nature, had become attached to Nature itself; and by the end of the eighteenth century the divinity, the sacredness of nature was, to those affected by this tradition, almost a first datum of consciousness. Wordsworth, then, did not have to construct this belief wholly out of his experience; much of it was given to him.

Much the same is true of the second of these fundamental beliefs, the belief in the grandeur and dignity of man, and the holiness of the heart's affections. This, too, was the product of forces originating (for our purposes) in the Renaissance; it had arisen out of the ruins of the theological view of man. As the 'Fall' receded further and further into the region of fable, man was increasingly regarded as a creature not only made in, but retaining, God's image; and Wordsworth could acknowledge, without misgiving, 'a grandeur in the beatings of the heart,' and speak in good faith of 'man and his noble nature.' In Wordsworth's lifetime this humanism had taken a colouring from Rousseau, and the special nobility of man was therefore only to be looked for 'in huts where poor men lie.' The 'higher' grades of society, in which the culture of the Renaissance had been exclusively fostered, were now

'A light, a cruel, and vain world, cut off
From the natural inlets of just sentiment,
From lowly sympathy, and chastening truth.'¹⁸

The blend of these two closely-related beliefs resulted, with Wordsworth, in his typical celebration of figures like the Leech-Gatherer, Michael, or 'Nature's Lady': beings whose humanity is ennobled by close association with 'mute insensate things.' Wordsworth is indebted to the traditions I have mentioned for his preconception that humanity is in closest touch with 'reality,' as well as in its healthiest, most wisely tranquil, state when it is most intimately blended with the cosmic processes.

Many and great changes have taken place since Wordsworth's time, changes which have involved the evaporation of most of his characteristic beliefs, both inherited and self-wrought. Few now have any faith in 'nature,' or in 'man,' or in the bond between man and nature. Most

readers seem to find it harder to yield 'imaginative assent' to these doctrines than to others more remote from our present habits of mind. The poetic tradition founded by Wordsworth is probably now dead and superseded. Yet as he is the first, so he remains the type, of the 'modern' poets who, 'left alone' with a vaster material than his, must bear as best they can, unaided by any universally-held mythology, the 'weight of all this unintelligible world.'

NOTES

1. *Prelude*, xiv. 160.
2. *Prelude*, ii. 254.
3. *Ibid.*, 362.
4. The italics are mine.
5. Coleridge, *Biog. Lit.*, ch. xiii. (vol i. p. 202 in Shawcross).
6. Phrases from the opening of ch. xiv. of *Biog. Lit.*
7. Lines 208-286.
8. *Prelude*, v. 382.
9. *Resolution and Independence*, stanza xix.
10. *Stepping Westward*, verse 2.
11. *Excursion*, i. 943.
12. *Prelude*, xiii. 375.
13. In *Wordsworth's Literary Criticism*, ed. Nowell C. Smith (London, 1925), p. 51.
14. *Lyrical Ballads*, Pref., p. 25 in *Wordsworth's Lit. Crit.*
15. Coleridge, *Biog. Lit.*, ch. v. vol. i, p. 59. The other quoted phrases on this and the former page are also Coleridge's.
16. xii. 276.
17. Sir T. Browne, *Rel. Med.*, i. sect. xvi.
18. *Prelude*, ix, 349.

Nature and the Humanization of the Self in Wordsworth

WHEN WORDSWORTH was fourteen, the ordinary sight of boughs silhouetted against a bright evening sky left so vivid an impression on his mind that it marked the beginning of his career as poet. "I recollect distinctly," he writes as a man in his seventies, "the very spot where this first struck me. It was in the way between Hawkshead and Ambleside, and gave me extreme pleasure. The moment was important in my poetical history for I date from it my consciousness of the infinite variety of natural appearances which had been unnoticed by the poets of any age or country." Such nature-consciousness, joined to an answering self-consciousness, is the "incumbent mystery" from which Wordsworth's poetry springs. He begins with the weight of sense-experience through which, as two of his characteristic metaphors put it, the "foundations" of the mind are laid, or the soul is "seeded" by feelings and images capable of sustaining it throughout life. There is no vision in his poetry that is not a vision of natural appearances pressing upon child or adult in this way. Nature—for Wordsworth chiefly rural nature, the abiding presences of mountain, lake, and field under the influence of the changing seasons—is a haunted house through which we must pass before our spirit can be independent. Those separated too soon from this troubling and sensuous contact with Nature—the strongest passages in Wordsworth's autobiographical poem, *The Prelude*, are devoted to Nature's ministry of fear rather than her minis-

A revision by the author of the "Introduction" to *William Wordsworth: Selected Poetry and Prose* (New American Library, New York, 1970). Copyright © 1970 by Geoffrey Hartman. It is printed here by permission of the author and the publisher.

try of beauty—may grow up with an empty, if powerful, sense of self. They have skipped a necessary stage of development; and without a filial relation to Nature, to that animate earth and heaven which plays so crucial a role in ancient myth, they become unimaginative or require increasingly personal and violent stimuli. "The sun strengthens us no more, neither does the moon" (D. H. Lawrence). The result is that revolutionary or self-alienating, rather than creative, personality in which Wordsworth saw the great temptation of his epoch, and to which he himself almost succumbed. His poetry, with its emphasis on "the infinite variety of natural appearances" and on the way the simplest event can enrich mind, sets itself against "gross and violent stimulants" in the realm of the senses or of public action.

If Wordsworth seems prophetic in his concern with the revolutionary mentality, and with our alienation from Nature, it is because he lived at the beginning of our epoch. A country boy, born and raised in the English Lake District, he found himself at nineteen years of age in the midst of two great upheavals, the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution. Between 1790, his first visit to France and the Alps on a walking tour (on partial truancy from his studies at Cambridge, which was little more than an "inter-world" to him), and 1800, when he settled down for good in the Lake District, Wordsworth lived these events as eyewitness and participant. He lived the French Revolution, in particular, so strongly that it shook his identity as poet and Englishman. He passed through the crisis, however; and the poems that ensued, of which *Lyrical Ballads* was the first collection (1798; second edition, expanded by a new volume, 1800), are not naive nature lyrics but expressive of a mind that had returned to health after long sickness. While the response of Wordsworth's contemporaries was less than enthusiastic, later generations were struck by the prophetic and representative character of these poems. John Stuart Mill and Matthew Arnold felt that Wordsworth's sickness, or crisis, was also theirs; and they wished for his kind of strength in overcoming it. How much agony lay behind that strength was not revealed till *The Prelude* was published in 1850, the year of the poet's death.

The Prelude recounts Wordsworth's "return to Nature" after inner revolutions and discontinuities, parallel to those in the world outside. His return—qualified, devious and complex—is supported by certain venerable ideas, in particular the idea that nature and human consciousness are interdependent or "correspondent" powers. Though these concepts are made new, Wordsworth's originality never lies in

his ideas as such. It has to do with the way they emerge from the depth of felt experience. They are organic thoughts: we see them growing on him, we watch him struggling with his own—often unexpected—imaginings. "A shy spirit in my heart / That comes and goes / Will sometimes leap / From hiding-places ten years deep" (*The Waggoner*). A new attitude toward consciousness—a radical consciousness of consciousness—is brought to light: Wordsworth is truly a subjective thinker. He is the first to establish a vulgate for the imagination, to use words which are our words and feelings which move in a natural rather than fictionally condensed time. Today, when every poet "walks naked" (Yeats), it may be hard to appreciate the courage Wordsworth showed and the advance in sensibility he made possible. All the more so because, having cleansed the doors of perception, and made a supreamer fiction possible, he drew back from releasing his imagination toward that end. His poetry may renounce too much and be too self-involved in its struggle against fictional or visionary devices. Many of his contemporaries did not value the stripped nature of his poetry, the characteristic Wordsworthian bareness: what they saw was poverty of imagination and the scandal of subjectivity.

A *subjective thinker*: the phrase comes from Kierkegaard. But what exactly does subjectivity, that much abused word, mean? Especially when qualified by "Romantic" it conjures up a world in schism: here objects, there subjects, here idiosyncrasy (calculated oddities, unpredictable sublimities), there normative behavior. This understanding of subjectivity is in error. Subjectivity means that the starting point for authentic reflection is placed in the individual consciousness. Not, necessarily, the empirical starting point, but the ontological, or what might also be called the Archimedean, point. Archimedes said he could move the world had he a point whereon to rest his machine. "Who has not felt," Wordsworth says, alluding to the story, "the same aspiration as regards the world of his own mind?" If this Archimedean point is genuinely within the personal consciousness, dualism is overcome, for the source of inspiration (the empirical starting point) can be anything and anywhere.

The expansion of sensibility characteristic of the modern period is certainly related to this free and eccentric placement of the empirical starting point. The modern mind can start ("turn on") anywhere because it has a surer homing instinct, or because it accepts what Hölderlin called "*die ekzentrische Bahn*": the necessity of passing through self-alienation to self-fulfillment. Wordsworth finds his inspiration vir-

tually anywhere: he recalls us to the simplest incidents, to words or events that would pass us by. "Behold," he says, as in "The Solitary Reaper," "stop here, or gently pass." Gently, because we are on mysterious ground; and if we do not wish to stop and think further, we should allow the impression to develop in its time. The horizontal extension of the scope of the poet's subject matter is only an aspect of something more important: its vertical extension, its inward resonance.

There is always a reserve in the experiences Wordsworth depicts. It may suddenly develop in the poet or profoundly displace his initial thought. "The Solitary Reaper," for instance, did not fructify in him till two years after his sister had seen an analogous sight (Wordsworth often "borrowed" her eyes and ears), and it moves in an excursive yet natural arc from the girl through reflections covering past, present, and future. In "Tintern Abbey" this remarkable turning of the mind also makes us aware of the virtues of the vernacular, which Wordsworth brings back to dignity. Only the "subtle intercourse" of spoken language, its submerged metaphors, its quietly syntactic power, can really respect this expansion of the mind beyond its first impressions.

Let us sample this open and natural style, which can be so plain as to be anti-literary. In the first two books of *The Prelude* Wordsworth describes the education—mainly by natural influences—of a young boy. From the age of about five to thirteen consciousness of self is still merged with nature-consciousness, though there are intimations of real separateness, of genuine selfhood. Wordsworth recalls an incident which helped him to see nature as Nature: not only as a part of him but also as apart from him, as a presence enjoyed consciously rather than unconsciously, and so leading to firmer self-awareness:

Our steeds remounted and the summons given,
With whip and spur we through the chauntry flew
In uncouth race, and left the cross-legged knight,
And the stone-abbot, and that single wren
Which one day sang so sweetly in the nave
Of the old church, that—though from recent showers
The earth was comfortless, and, touched by faint
Internal breezes, sobbings of the place
And respirations, from the roofless walls
The shuddering ivy dripped large drops—yet still
So sweetly 'mid the gloom the invisible bird
Sang to herself, that there I could have made

My dwelling-place, and lived for ever there
 To hear such music. Through the walls we flew
 And down the valley, and, a circuit made
 In wantonness of heart, through rough and smooth
 We scampered homewards. Oh, ye rocks and streams,
 And that still spirit shed from evening air!
 Even in this joyous time I sometimes felt
 Your presence, when with slackened step we breathed
 Along the sides of the steep hills, or when
 Lighted by gleams of moonlight from the sea
 We beat with thundering hoofs the level sand.

(*Prelude* II. 115-37)

An aspect of inner life is vividly rendered here without the artifice of a fictional or displaced perspective: without allegory or personification or atomism. There is complete respect for ordinary experience as well as for its extraordinary potential. The theme of the episode is the emergence of Nature as a distinct presence, and the relation of this to the child's growing sense of "thereness"—of real, if still uncertain, identity. Yet a dimension is added which is hard to define because it is not purely the illustration of that theme. During the act of recall the poet's consciousness becomes, to adopt words of Wallace Stevens, "part of the *res*, and not about it." The memory Wordsworth set out to record yields as if spontaneously to a second memory (II. 118-28) continuous with the first but more inward. The poet's initial memory still embraces it, but he is tempted to rest with the supervening memory as with a symbol. When he comes on that second, more internal image (on the "single wren," deceptively enumerated along with the cross-legged knight and stone-abbot, though lifting the whole out of historical into human time), he is forced to stop, to enter the solitude he then intuited, the "I" rather than the "we." He dwells on that event to the point of slowing the narrative movement to a halt that parallels even now (some thirty years later) a moment in the past which prepared him for selfhood.

Wordsworth's "open" style—the displacement of a first memory by a second—shows that memory is creative rather than nostalgic: still sensitive to a past that can modify and even reverse a present state of mind. What is peculiarly Wordsworthian, however, is that the displacement of which we have spoken is continuous, that the supervening memory remains within the frame of its matrix. Belated intuitions, which arise "from the structure of [the poet's] own mind . . . with-

out immediate external excitement" (though with the incitement, as here, of a prior, internalized image) are not allowed to break but merely to extend the matrix. Analogously, looking to Wordsworth's poetry as a whole, there are no sharp breaks or ritual passings between one state of mind and another: vision is always continuous with sensation. Even such licensed rapture as Keats's "Already with thee!" is avoided.

Wordsworth's "underconsciousness" of the past, or his sense for renovative continuities, is to be understood as aiming for greater stakes than mental health. It has a millennial as well as a therapeutic dimension. Wordsworth shares the myth of progress characteristic of the eighteenth century, though radically modifying it. Like contemporary demythologizers he believed that the mind of man could be "enlightened" or progressively purified of myth and superstition. What Shakespeare or Milton did by the liberal use of visionary devices he would do by truth to nature alone. However, instead of clearly breaking with the past, he conceives progress as the individual's greater participation in that past—his repossession of imaginative energies denied by reason but only displaced by myth and fable. The latter are imperfect expressions of that "fear and awe" (and sense of beauty) which befall us when we are nature-haunted. When myth or fable interpose too early between us and experience they alienate the growing spirit from its universal patrimony of "Nature":

How awful is the might of souls,
And what they do within themselves while yet
The yoke of earth is new to them, the world
Nothing but a wild field where they were sown.

(*Prelude* III. 180–83)

To that ground, then, which is in the form of memory or past experience only because of a false theory of nurture that dispossesses imagination while pretending to civilize it, Wordsworth returned. The imagination which has no past can have no future. It becomes blank or black, empty or apocalyptic. The episode from *Prelude* II roots us, therefore, in the past, and moves from the feeling of personal continuity to a vision of the chain of being. The immemorial nature of the earth evoked in the lines between dashes (120–24) adds itself to the historical past suggested by the ruined chapel and completes in this way the visionary resonance of one fugitive, personal event.

It was at Grasmere, a village nestling among the lakes of northern

England, that Wordsworth became fully, prophetically conscious of his special role among the great English poets. He settled there with Dorothy in the winter of 1799 after his visit to Germany. Coleridge moved to the nearby village of Keswick. In 1802 the poet married Mary Hutchinson, a childhood friend; while her sister Sara, who came to live with the Wordsworths, was intended by them for the poet's brother John after he should have made his fortune as a merchant captain.

The Wordsworth household at Grasmere—the poet, three women, and Coleridge nearby—was not just a family but a utopian community: the Susquehanna scheme revived on the banks of Windermere. It does not last long: Coleridge, ill in health and disaffected from his wife, leaves for Malta in 1804 (*The Prelude* becomes an oversize verse letter to him); John Wordsworth is drowned in 1805, a shock from which the community never recovered; and there are many financial, as well as personal, worries. But those five years, from late 1799 to 1805, were essential. We know a great deal about them through Coleridge's recently published *Notebooks* and through Dorothy's *Journals*.

When Wordsworth said of Dorothy, "She gave me eyes, she gave me ears," it was no vain compliment. In her *Journals* we read, for example, of their meeting the poor old man who became the Leech Gatherer of "Resolution and Independence" or that description of the daffodils which Wordsworth transformed into "I wandered lonely as a cloud." The members of the community exchanged feelings and observations, noted the slightest stirrings in nature and the simplest human excitements. Wordsworth's poetry becomes, even more than at Alfoxden, a "living calendar" which records the imaginative pleasures provided by the countryside, but also some contrary "fears and fancies . . . dim sadness . . . blind thoughts" ("Resolution and Independence"). These disturbances are often caused, paradoxically, by poetry itself: by the labor of composition, which could make the poet physically ill. Wordsworth had an intense consciousness of what great poetry was before him, and a constant need to reaffirm his own genius and difference. Thus the mystery of vocation kept moving to the center and made an autobiographical poem inevitable.

Composing *The Prelude* Wordsworth discovers—not abstractly, but in the very act of reflective writing—how vulnerable the ego is, but also how many chances there are for self-renewal. Aided only by the action of the mind on itself, and the small, affectionate community he has built up, he describes the corporate nature of selfhood, the in-

terpenetration of past and present selves, and the quiet yet infinite ties between man and man, or man and nature, without which we could not exist. Conscious of these ties, and reinforcing the most elemental as well as the most subtle of them, his poetry emanates a healing power celebrated by Victorian readers and still recognized by critics of our era from Walter Raleigh to F. R. Leavis and Lionel Trilling. In the famous preface, which was written at Grasmere, to *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth announces clearly that link between poetry and the sympathetic imagination which the younger Romantics (Hazlitt, Keats, and Shelley) will espouse more militantly:

What then does the Poet? He considers man and the objects that surround him as acting and reacting upon each other, so as to produce an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure; he considers man in his own nature and in his ordinary life as contemplating this . . . as looking upon this complex scene of ideas and sensations, and finding everywhere objects that immediately excite in him sympathies. . . . He is the rock of defence for human nature; an upholder and preserver, carrying everywhere with him relationship and love. In spite of difference of soil and climate, of language and manners, of laws and customs; in spite of things silently gone out of mind, and things violently destroyed; the Poet binds together by passion and knowledge the vast empire of human society, as it spreads over the whole earth, and over all time.

He considers man in his own nature and in his ordinary life. Milton did not, and Shakespeare generally did not. Only Chaucer, perhaps, comes close to being a master of ordinary life in poetry. But Chaucer's realism is accompanied, and ironically blended, with romance modes of narration. Nothing could be more realistic than his portrait of the Wife of Bath, or the psychology of the tale she tells, yet this tale is full of supernatural and romance motifs. This difference between Chaucer and Wordsworth is more than a difference between narrative and lyrical. Wordsworth teaches imagination to rejoice in itself in a new way: what was expressed, prior to him, in the displaced though magnanimous form of male Vision or female Romance, is now confronted humanely and directly:

Not Chaos, not
The darkest pit of lowest Erebus,
Nor aught of blinder vacancy, scooped out
By help of dreams—can breed such fear and awe
As fall upon us often when we look

Into our Minds, into the Mind of Man—

My haunt, and the main region of my song.

(“Prospectus” [written circa 1800]
to *The Excursion* [1814])

Out of this farewell to myth contemporary poetry is born. Although the farewell proves somewhat premature (Wallace Stevens’ “Phoebus is dead, ephebe” is still part of it), this example of a man resisting tradition in favor of imagination, then resisting his own imagination, dominates modern poetry. Rejecting all visionary aids, and all rhetorical inflation, Wordsworth had hoped for a progress of the sympathetic imagination anticipated by this change in the form of poetry: a progress that would humanize our feelings and expand them till they sympathized even with “mute, insensate things.”

Wordsworth’s vision of that Progress was not parochial but universal. *The Prelude* implies a new and original model for human development. Its realism clarifies the mystery of identity. Like Freud, Wordsworth begins at a point far removed from the humanistic axiom, “Nothing human is alien to me.” On the contrary everything human is alien to us initially. The sense for the human is achieved, painfully won, not given. The quasi-mythical scheme underlying *The Prelude*’s theory of development is similar to that sketched in the “Intimation: Ode”: we are born as aliens into a world which is at most a foster home, or substitute heaven. Our destiny, therefore, is to accept a world which is less than our hopes conceive, though great enough. Nature, with lesser glory than the mythical heaven from which the child fell, attracts our imagination until it becomes this-worldly. It sows its images in the child’s mind, it blends with our imagination: the river Derwent, Wordsworth writes, “sent a voice / That flowed along my dreams.” The first two books of *The Prelude* describe this naturalization of the child, its weaning from the milk of paradise, from inchoate dreams and apocalyptic stirrings. The sentimentalists who hold that for Wordsworth childhood is all could not be further from the truth. Yes, childhood is closest to divinity, but also to narcissistic self-absorption. The question is how to humanize one’s soul without losing it, how to bind the child’s imagination without binding it down. A man’s sense of the light that was can be his greatest obstacle. Wordsworth describes some of the trials of the soul that we undergo to become civilized persons.

If Nature fails, the child’s development is arrested, and he becomes either an idiot whose “life is with God,” or a premature adult, doomed

to cynicism or alienation. If Nature succeeds, the child is organically ready to be humanized, and humanization is the second developmental step covered by *The Prelude*. The two steps are, of course, interrelated: and the road from "love of nature" to "love of man," even though built, in Wordsworth's case, on a strong and sensuous foundation, is so precarious that its charting occupies the greater part of his secular poem. Thus *The Prelude* is a *Bildungsroman* that takes the child from solipsism to society and from his unconsciously apocalyptic mind, dreaming of an utterly different world, to a sense of realities. It is the epic of civilization, the epic of the emergence of an individual consciousness out of a field of forces that includes imagination, nature, and society. "How then are Souls to be made?" asks Keats. "How then are these sparks which are God to have identity given them—so as ever to possess a bliss peculiar to each one's individual existence? How but by the medium of a world like this?" That, after Wordsworth, is the unforgettable theme.

Wordsworth, together with Blake, is the last of a giant race of poets to whom the moderns are as indebted as the neoclassical poets to their Renaissance predecessors. Sometimes, with the pressures of contemporary life what they are, Wordsworth's poetry may seem too reflective or low-powered. Yet we rarely cease to feel the agony or urgency from which it sprang. It mediates between the modern world and a desperate imagination, one that sees itself deprived of genuine relations with that world. The tempo of industrialization seemed to Wordsworth to encourage a rootless and abstract kind of existence, a man-made nature alienating us from Nature. Love, or the sympathetic imagination, could not flourish long in that artificial environment: imagination, indeed, could not even grow to become love in that soil. It needed a slower birth and a more generous nurture, for the imaginative spirit in us is wild, and only gradually humanized. Wordsworth's sense of apocalypse is simply his pre-vision of the failure of that process of humanization. The modern imagination, stronger than ever, but also more homeless than ever, falls back into itself, or endlessly outward. It becomes solipsistic or seeming-mad. We understand Wordsworth best when we are too near ourselves, too naked in our self-consciousness. Then his poetry, its strange spiritual calculus, its balancing of imaginative failure with elemental gratitudes, can still infuse a modest and rocky strength: "O joy! That in our embers / Is something that doth live" ("Intimations Ode").

The *Lyrical Ballads*

THE PRIMARY task undertaken by these ballads is implied by Wordsworth's *Advertisement*: the liberation of the reader from his own "pre-established codes of decision" (PW II, 383). With the exception of two poems that to all intents and purposes are written in the poet's own character, *To My Sister* and *Lines Written in Early Spring*, they are presentational structures that subject the reader to a redemptive experience. Of these the simplest are the two dramatic monologues, *The Mad Mother* and *The Complaint of a forsaken Indian Woman*, which dramatize the powers of the mind to survive extremity. *Exposition and Reply* and *The Tables Turned* presented a debate between two speakers who represent a formal opposition of types, as in *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*, and who together generate a stable and comprehensive equilibrium. Like the pedlar of *The Ruined Cottage*, "William" advances a naturalistic creed, but in a form that is highly condensed and gaily provocative. Matthew's humanism is eloquent and complementary, and by no means supplies the target for the more serious attack on the "meddling intellect" in the second poem, *The Tables Turned*. If Matthew is denied the last word, his praise of the "spirit / Breath'd from dead men to their kind" is nevertheless an eloquent assertion of Wordsworth's own commitment to his art. He sought to transfigure "those barren leaves," not to deride them.

In all the other ballads Wordsworth employs a narrative persona, who, like the speaker of the *Lines* on the yew tree, enters into direct

From *The Making of Wordsworth's Poetry, 1785-1798* (Harvard University Press, 1973), pp. 187-204. Copyright 1973 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College. Reprinted by permission of the author and the publisher.

relationship with the reader and molds his response to a shared object. In *Goody Blake and Harry Gill*, for example, this speaker plays a relatively straightforward role: like characters in the Racedown poems, his language represents a purified selection of common speech and his tone assumes a perfect unity of interest between his audience of "farmers," himself, and his subject. He directs attention not only to the power of the imagination, under the influence of a curse, to "produce such changes even in our physical nature as might almost appear miraculous" (*Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. de Selincourt and Darbishire, II, 401 app. crit.), but to the subjection of the imagination to the moral law of charity.

In other ballads the relationship between narrator, reader, and object grows more complex. As Robert Mayo has pointed out, the subjects of most are quite conventional.¹ In the magazine poetry of the day a reader would have found many sympathetic studies of such impoverished beggars as Simon Lee, rural tragedies like Martha Ray's, and even, perhaps, benevolent treatments of an idiot boy. But Wordsworth's use of such stock subjects is anything but conventional. He relies upon their power to elicit a stock response, to fit the taste of his audience like a glove, and then, by deft and brilliant manipulations of tone, imagery, and point of view, subjects such responses to redemptive discipline. He conducts the emotions of his reader like a symphony, isolating pride, contempt, or disgust, and calling forth other powers of the mind to transmute and obliterate them.

Many readers, for example, have deprecated the banality of Simon Lee's swelling ankles, without noting that their dissatisfaction with the image is presumed and exploited by the poem itself. As John Danby has pointed out in his penetrating study of the poem,² it gradually unfolds a vision of a world in which all living things are subject to decay. At the same time, however, Wordsworth's tone delicately balances between earnest and game, and suspends a solemn response to what would otherwise be an object of conventional pity. It is in the course of a conventional list of Simon's ills that the offending image first appears:

He has no son, he has no child,
His wife, an aged woman,
Lives with him, near the waterfall,
Upon the village common.

And he is lean and he is sick,
His little body's half awry

THE LYRICAL BALLADS

His ancles they are swoln and thick
His legs are thin and dry.
When he was young he little knew
Of husbandry or tillage. . . .

(ll. 29-38)

The image is introduced casually, and no notice whatever is taken of the discomfiture it might produce in a reader who reserves his pity for tidier objects, such as the speaker of the popular *Beggar's Petition*, which Wordsworth knew as a schoolboy:

These tatter'd clothes my poverty bespeak,
These hoary locks proclaim my lengthen'd years;
And many a furrow in my grief-worn cheek
Has been a channel to a flood of tears.³

As the first part of Simon Lee ends, however, attention suddenly returns to this image:

Few months of life has he in store,
As he to you will tell,
For still, the more he works, the more
His poor old ancles swell.

(ll. 65-68)

Although the tone of these lines remains that of a homespun chronicle of rural woes, diction again veers toward the particular, as the reader's attention is led by a simple but ineluctable logic back to Simon's ankles, a concrete fact that, like the intrusive truths of the Racedown poems—the scene of Rivers' crime in *The Borderers*, for example—cannot be veiled in abstraction or generality. The tale told by these lines is universal and portentous: the hopeless struggle of a decaying organism to survive. Their very form, indeed, stresses the irony with which this struggle brings on its own defeat: the formerly excursive energy of Simon's "work" is now also "working" within and destroying him, with a power realized by the ugliness of the final verb.

The speaker then drops the subject of Simon Lee altogether, and without warning, in the center of a stanza, turns on the reader:

My gentle reader, I perceive
How patiently you've waited,
And I'm afraid that you expect
Some tale will be related.

(ll. 69-72)

Each word is edged with an irony that owes much to the position of this address immediately following the indecorous image of Simon's ankles. Even as it acknowledges the social gulf between the old huntsman and the reader, the adjective "gentle" reminds us that mortality does not respect class boundaries, and that the pride that finds organic decay offensive is no defense against an identical fate.⁴ The cool scrutiny of "I perceive" is sharpened by the fact that the reader has by no means waited "patiently" for the tale he expects, as the rambling structure of the first part has insured. Implied, too, is the reader's blindness to the "tale" already told by Simon's ankles, a tale that concerns him more than he knows.

Wordsworth's speaker thus sets a trap for the reader's pride, using the image of Simon's ankles as bait. By suddenly revealing his insight into the reader's reactions, furthermore, he establishes his authority. Casting off the mask of humble balladeer, he assumes a role not unlike that of the pedlar, and establishes what Wordsworth would call "that dominion over the spirits of readers by which they are to be humbled and humanised, in order that they may be purified and exalted" (*PW* II, 426). In the following stanza this implicitly hostile confrontation suddenly dissolves, as the speaker's voice undergoes a further transformation into that of a redeemer, bent on the reader's salvation:

O reader! had you in your mind
Such stores as silent thought can bring,
O gentle reader! you would find
A tale in every thing.

(ll. 73-76)

Suffused by such enthusiasm, the epithet "gentle" comes to mean "generous" or "charitable," a meaning at once dramatized by the speaker's gift of the tale the reader expects.

The concluding anecdote presents another act of charity, in a form that elaborates the "tale" told by Simon's ankles. The speaker recalls the old man's vain struggle to uproot a stump, and his own easy and hearty response:

"You're overtasked, good Simon Lee,
Give me your tool" to him I said;
And at the word right gladly he
Received my proffer'd aid.
I struck, and with a single blow
The tangled root I sever'd,

THE LYRICAL BALLADS

At which the poor old man so long
And vainly had endeavour'd.

(ll. 89-96)

At the conclusion of a poem in which the only action has been the slow decay of life, this "single blow" becomes more than a particular act of charity. It is a powerful and liberating release of protective energy, a gesture of defense, and even revenge, on behalf of a humanity caught in the inexorable processes of natural law.

The narrator's tone suggests, however, that he speaks in the pride of his youth and strength, and Simon's response comes to him as a revelation:

The tears into his eyes were brought,
And thanks and praises seemed to run
So fast out of his heart, I thought
They never would have done.
—I've heard of hearts unkind, kind deeds
With coldness still returning.
Alas! the gratitude of men
Has oftner left me mourning.

(ll. 97-104)

The first four lines of this final stanza alter our perspective once again. Attention shifts from Simon's outward decay to the undiminished activity of his heart. The unobtrusive metaphor "to run," which constitutes the poem's only "run-on" ending at this point in the stanza, recalls the physical activity of Simon's youth, when he was a "*running* huntsman merry." It suggests his spiritual survival, identifies it with the physical vigor of the youthful speaker, and precludes a condescending pity for the "poor old man," as Simon was described at the close of the preceding stanza.

To the uninitiated reader, who expects from the poet some sign of pleasure won from benevolence, some complacent hint that self-love and social concern are the same, the final lines will come as a paradox and an anticlimax. But the initiated reader has been taught to resolve this paradox. He understands that this "gratitude" is extorted from Simon's heart by a decay that is the common fate of man, and that it is ampler cause for "mourning" than the "unkindness" that he himself has been asked to surrender during the course of the poem. He is thus invited to compare what he was with what he has become during his experience of the poem, and to join the speaker and Simon Lee in an

act of charity that springs from a shared understanding of what it is to be a man.

The Idiot Boy asks still more of the reader, and again does so through a narrator who transforms a condescending pity and indeed disgust into an affirmation of the dignity and the autonomy of the boy's existence. The plot of the poem not only traces the "more subtle windings" of the "maternal passion," as Wordsworth explained (*PW* II, 388 *app. crit.*); it renders Betty Foy a means of elevating our response to her son, who is from the beginning of the poem presented as an object of her love. The narrator himself elevates our response still further, encouraging us to apprehend and to participate in the boy's feelings for their own sake. The first fourth of the poem, for example, describes an episode that is mock-heroic: the mounting of a steed. But the narrator manipulates attention and molds response to protect Johnny against ridicule, and to suggest that he possesses a dignity that rises above the bustling solicitude of his mother. At the climactic moment of his departure she becomes quiet:

She gently pats the pony's side,
On which her idiot boy must ride,
And seems no longer in a hurry.
(ll. 79-81)

Gesture renders Betty's conflicting feelings visible: her love and fear for her son and her dependence on the saner of the two travelers, the pony. In the next stanza attention moves, via the body of the pony, to another image of touch: Johnny's sensation, for the first time in his life, of the movement of a living steed beneath him.

But when the pony moved his legs,
Oh! then for the poor idiot boy!
For joy he cannot hold the bridle,
For joy his head and heels are idle,
He's idle all for very joy.
(ll. 82-86)

We are lured into an act of empathic identification, first with the boy's senses, and then, carried on the tide of the narrator's enthusiasm, with his heart.

Even as the narrator's syntax breaks down before his feelings,

Oh! then for the poor idiot boy!

his diction mimes a conventional pity for the "poor" idiot, a stock pity that is belied by the shared joy of both boy and narrator, and in the following lines is obliterated. Repetition, patterned syntax, and clustered sound effects such as alliteration, consonance, and the feminine rhyme, all condense, intensify, and purify the power of "very joy," with a force that in Wordsworth's later phrase "bears down before it, like a deluge, every feeble sensation of disgust and aversion" (Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Early Years*, revised by C. L. Shaver, p. 357). Calling on the power of the human heart as he had called on a "deluge" of divine, natural, and human power in 1792, he forces the condescending reader to a spiritual crisis: he must assent to and participate in this celebration of joy, or deliberately and actively resist it. He must commit himself.

Nor does Wordsworth allow this act of affirmation, if undertaken, to proceed on the reader's own terms; he refuses to encourage the pretense that the idiot is a normal child, as his readers, including Coleridge, advised him to do.⁵ At the poem's end he reverts to the mock-heroic mode and allows us to listen to Johnny's recitation of his adventure:

And thus to Betty's question, he
 Made answer, like a traveller bold,
 (His very words I give to you,)
 "The cocks did crow to-whoo, to-whoo,
 "And the sun did shine so cold."
 —Thus answered Johnny in his glory,
 And that was all his travel's story.
 (ll. 457-463)

We are given his "very words" with a precision that calls attention to this supreme violation of the "language of the higher and more cultivated orders," as Francis Jeffrey would describe it,⁶ and to the fact that we have been brought into sympathy with a creature whose vision of the world is utterly alien to ours.

Wordsworth thus confirms the gulf we have bridged if we have read his poem with feeling; and in the penultimate line he suggests the significance of this act with the word he had applied to the moon in the *Night-piece*—"glory." Both the moon and the idiot are indeed "glories," or revelations, and both merit the "sublime expression of scripture" that Wordsworth would apply to the idiot in 1802: "their life is hidden with God" (*EY*, p. 357). Both visions, furthermore, extend back to

1792, when he read in Ramond of the *cretin* of the Rhone Valley, and the reverence paid him by the Swiss,⁷ a race that to the author of *Descriptive Sketches* seemed a type of human excellence, and an "image" of man's "glorious sire" (l. 527). In *The Idiot Boy*, therefore, he invites an English audience to regain this state by participating in an act of affirmation and charity that, as he wrote to John Wilson, is the "great triumph of the human heart," and a manifestation of "the strength, disinterestedness, and grandeur of love" (*EY*, p. 357). He seeks to accomplish the "glorious renovation" promised by the Revolution, and the "glory" he names at the end of his poem is intended not only for his putative hero, but for the far greater triumph of the reader himself.

In both *Simon Lee* and *The Idiot Boy* the narrator functions in the same way as the pedlar; he ministers to the reader, conducting him through an experience of purgation that issues in a final transfiguration. In a final group of ballads, however, Wordsworth inverts this pattern in a direction that prophesies the narrative techniques of *Emma* or *The Turn of the Screw*: he constructs a dramatic context that exposes the limitations of the narrator's mind. The narrator himself becomes an object of criticism and a butt of irony, and the reader is invited to rise above him. In the *Anecdote for Fathers* and *We Are Seven*, for example, adult narrators enter into seriocomic debates with children, and seek violently to impose demonstrative categories of thought and value on their seemingly helpless but truly invulnerable victims.

A comic antitype to the voice who spoke from the yew tree, the father of the first poem forces his son not only to choose between two landscapes and to exalt one at the price of contempt for the other, but to justify that choice: "Why? Edward, tell me why?" (l. 48). He thus coerces the boy into a palpable lie, which is occasioned by an impulse (the image of the weathercock) from the very landscape the boy deems. Perceiving what he has done, the speaker then recovers his humility before the landscape and his own son.

The narrator of *We Are Seven* comes upon a scene that survives from the Racedown poems: a fixed, dedicated vigil by a grave. And he responds as Mortimer (or Wordsworth) had responded to a similar accusation, by appealing to rational categories of thought that dissect the living being of their victim. But this victim is now a little girl, and the criminal is an obtuse commonsensical adult who is quite helpless before the obdurate integrity of her vision of death. He is, further-

more, quite precisely at the "cross-purposes" Max Beerbohm satirized in his well-known cartoon. He is capable of an intuitive response to her beauty and power, as the daring simplicity of his language makes clear:

Her eyes were fair, and very fair,
—Her beauty made me glad.

(ll. 11–12)

But before her vision, which cannot distinguish between physical and spiritual, he retreats, grasping at the categories of demonstrative reason for certainty and order. Unlike the speaker of the previous poem, he remains unregenerate, and his final words ironically indict him:

'Twas throwing words away; for still
The little Maid would have her will,
And said, "Nay, we are seven!"

(ll. 67–69)

He confidently assumes the support of his reader, who nevertheless perceives that he has been "throwing words away" in a sense far deeper than he can understand, and that it is his will, and not the girl's, that his categories subserve.

Perhaps the greatest personal triumph among the ballads is the third poem in this group, *The Thorn*. Here Wordsworth confronts the most threatening images of the Racedown years, clustering together in a single "spot" a gibbet, a pool, a grave, and the figure of a deserted woman who is rooted to her place by love and grief.⁸ And he approaches these objects through a narrator who again burlesques the division of sensibility he had himself suffered and provides a living foil to what he sees. This speaker, whose function and character have been debated since the poem appeared,⁹ is Wordsworth's third depiction of a mind incapable of reconciling intuitive and demonstrative modes of perception. Haunted by the central images, he responds to their mystery and power with an insistent, implicitly obsessive and at times violent struggle to be relieved of uncertainty, and to reduce it to mathematical order or positive fact.

Such conflict is implied entirely by style in the opening stanzas of the poem, even before the reader has been introduced to Martha Ray or her story:

There is a thorn; it looks so old,
In truth you'd find it hard to say,

How it could ever have been young,
It looks so old and gray.

(ll. 1-4)

The narrator begins with a brute fact—"There is a thorn"—and evinces a concern for "truth" that is at once ironically qualified by an uncritical imputation of this truth to the reader, and an easy assumption of agreement. His is a repetitive mind which circles back to a given fact, moving at great speed but going nowhere. And, despite its positivism, it is an imaginative mind which at once begins to elaborate the concrete fact and to personify it: the thorn becomes "old," and finally, like a human being, "old and gray."

The next line witnesses another characteristic act, as the speaker measures the thorn:

Not higher than a two-years' child,
It stands erect this aged thorn. . . .

(ll. 5-6)

That his "measuring-rod" is a child not only prepares the reader for the revelations that follow, but assesses the quality of the speaker's mind: he is haunted by the image of Martha's child and the living mystery of her passion, which he will seek to measure and dissect throughout the poem. A final and more grotesque implication is that he has literally measured the thorn to determine whether an infant could be hanged on it.

In the second stanza he personifies the moss, endowing it with an active desire to "bury" the implicitly evil presence of the thorn. As his attention moves toward the second of the four central objects, the pond, his concern with measurement becomes obsessive. He fixes each object in precise relationship to its neighbors, noting details that suggest his struggle to control and stabilize haunting and powerful images. The thorn is "five yards" from the path, to the left, "three yards beyond" is the pond, which he has observed long enough to know that it is "never dry," and which he has measured from "side to side": "Tis three feet long, and two feet wide" (l. 33). Since Coleridge singled out this line as evidence of the point that Southey and others had made before him, that a dull narrator cannot tell an interesting tale, it has repeatedly been cited as an example of Wordsworth's own banality.¹⁰ But it proceeds from an attempt to expose a banality that is not Wordsworth's but the modern world's: an insensitivity that meas-

ures but cannot feel. The passage demonstrates, furthermore, that any act may be rendered significant (and theoretically poetic) by the mind that performs it. This speaker has measured the pond, as well as the thorn, to determine whether it is the proper size. A man who can "peep and botanize" on a grave, he is blind to the moral and emotional implications of his actions.

The speaker proceeds to describe the remaining empirical facts—the hill of moss and the figure of Martha Ray herself—and then lays bare the rest of his evidence in the manner of an amateur detective reporting on a private inquest into a village mystery. He repeats the local gossip, and then moves to the more authoritative evidence of his own confrontation with Martha Ray on the summit of the mountain. His presentation constantly and repetitiously distinguishes between fact and surmise, between what he "knows"—a word that becomes the leitmotif of his discourse—and what he "cannot tell."¹¹ He is clearly fascinated and frightened by the mystery and seeks to probe it to its heart. His emblem is the telescope he carries to the mountaintop, an instrument that suggests a refusal to trust the eye, and the strained but frightened curiosity of the voyeur.¹² When Martha suddenly appears close before him, in an ambush that recalls the sailor's meeting with his wife in *Salisbury Plain*, he flees:

I did not speak—I saw her face,
Her face it was enough for me.
(ll. 199–200)

In her absence, however, he speculates with an intensity that takes visible form in the "spades" that slice toward the "little infant's bones" (ll. 234–235). Throughout this excited, hurrying, huddled colloquy, he draws the reader into his confidence, offering help, and imputing the questions of "what" and "wherefore" that obsess him. He is, in short, a precise antithesis to the pedlar: he cannot "read" the "moral properties and scopes of things"; he cannot move from fact to surmise; he cannot see with the "watchful eye of love." He is a study in busy, unselfconscious littleness.

He is, however, a faithful observer of the central image in the poem, that of Martha Ray. Five times his attention circles back to her fixed, unchanging figure, to the grand and permanent natural images that surround her—wind, mountain and stars—and to her unchanging cry: "Oh woe is me! Oh misery!" And each time he does so the reader's perception of these images enlarges, as a result of the gradual addition

of fact and circumstance, and of the emerging contrasts between Martha Ray and the speaker himself. These contrasts range from obvious antitheses, between plain and mountain, town and landscape, society and solitude, to "modes of being" that verge on the ineffable. The hyperactivity of his mind, for example, renders Martha's fixity increasingly majestic. His fear implies her power. His earnest but banal sympathy—

Oh me! ten thousand times I'd rather
That he had died, that cruel father!
(ll. 142-143)

purifies her complaint of sentimentality. His garrulity renders her single cry supremely eloquent. His refusal to move from fact to surmise becomes petty before her unceasing pain, and his preoccupation with causation and lurid detail (was it the pond or the thorn?) stresses the terrible simplicity of effect: "misery." Throughout the poem, then, the narrator's incessant activity pumps significance into the repeated images and the words of Martha Ray. The result is technically miraculous, and it fully justifies Wordsworth's defense of "repetition and apparent tautology" in his note to the poem (*PW* II, 513). Purely through the manipulation of context, Wordsworth transfigures the meaning of what is repeated, words that themselves remain utterly literal and commonplace. And he thus initiates the reader into a vision that rises far above the voice that speaks to him.

The ultimate effect of the poem is to exalt Martha Ray, and, by extension, the symbolic victims that had haunted Wordsworth's imagination since 1795. Placed beside Margaret, whose refusal to surrender hope had been rendered pathetic and terrible by her vulnerability—

and in the stormy day
Her tattered clothes were ruffled by the wind
Even at the side of her own fire—
(*PW* V, 399; ll. 734-736)

Martha Ray becomes heroic and indeed exultant, an aristocrat of pain. Her power is implied simply by the defiant integrity of her "scarlet cloak," or her indifference to the elements that had killed Margaret:

And she is known to every star,
And every wind that blows.
(ll. 69-70)

She is as obdurate and permanent as the crag the narrator takes her for, and yet she remains fully human in her pain. At the end of the poem the narrator affirms, for the last time, that this is all he knows, and leaves us with a scene from which horror, pity, and littleness have been purged:¹³

And this I know, full many a time,
When she was on the mountain high,
By day, and in the silent night,
When all the stars shone clear and bright,
That I have heard her cry,
"Oh misery! oh misery!
"Oh woe is me! oh misery!"

(ll. 247-253)

Attention moves from the great and permanent forms of nature to a single human cry. Refusing all consolation, and uttering its agony in the face of time, of necessity, and of silence, this tragic cry becomes triumphant.

Even such summary notice of the structure of these ballads suggests that they make immense demands on the reader. They resemble the "yellow primrose" that remained itself and "nothing more" to the hardened sensibility of Peter Bell, or the hero of *A Poet's Epitaph*, whom we must love before he will seem worthy of our love. They are predicated, that is, upon a reading that is at once close and responsive, and they quite obviously confounded the "pre-established codes of decision" that Wordsworth asked his audience to suspend when introducing them in 1798 (*PW* II, 383). To simple readers, as Coleridge pointed out, they could seem simple effusions and nothing more, the work of a "sweet, simple poet! and so natural, that little master Charles and his younger sister are so charmed with them, that they play at 'Goody Blake,' or at 'Johnny and Betty Foy'" (*BL* II, 131). To a sentimentally inclined reviewer like Charles Burney, *The Idiot Boy* could seem a tale of terror and not joy, and *Simon Lee* a touching genre-piece: "the portrait, admirably painted, of every huntsman who, by toil, age, and infirmities, is rendered unable to guide and govern his canine family."¹⁴

Neoclassical standards of decorum were of course equally opaque to the purposes of these poems, but if attacks based upon vulgarity of language and subject sometimes came from unexpected quarters, as when Southey compared the idiot boy to a "Dutch boor,"¹⁵ Words-

worth had presumed and indeed provoked such criticism in his poems, and enemies such as Francis Jeffrey were perhaps less unsettling than friends who debased as they praised. But Jeffrey could see these poems no more clearly than Master Charles. In his earliest reply to the *Preface* he pointed out that the emotions of a "clown, a tradesman, or a market-wench" were intrinsically unpoetic, and that "arts that aim at exciting admiration and delight, do not take their models from what is ordinary, but from what is excellent; and that our interest in the representation of any event does not depend upon our familiarity with the original, but upon its intrinsic importance, and the celebrity of the parties it concerns."¹⁶ He at once exemplifies the pride of class that is Wordsworth's target in the ballads, and illustrates the poet's paradoxical relationship to the neoclassical tradition. With the exception of his reference to "celebrity," Jeffrey's understanding of the purpose of art in no way differs from that which produced *The Idiot Boy*. Wordsworth by no means regards the idiot as "ordinary," but as a divine revelation. Nor does he hold up the idiot as an exemplary model of human nature; the "excellence" he imitates in the poem is an action, an ideal response to the idiot that is itself molded by a conception of human nature that is neither idiosyncratic nor primitivistic. As we have seen, we may trace it to Wordsworth's experience of the French Revolution, to a Miltonic conception of the nobility of man, and to an understanding of charity that is ultimately rooted in the New Testament. His attack on a neoclassical decorum that perpetuates human pride is itself classical in form, in that it appeals to objective and universal norms that are not only excellent but sublime. To Jeffrey, however, and to many readers since, Wordsworth appears to be degrading human nature: a precise inversion of his purpose that we must ascribe not only to a failure to read with the "watchful eye of love," but to a poetry that relies, to perhaps an impossible degree, on implication and indirection, and thus on the reader's heart.

For all the controversy they have inspired, these poems are nevertheless technical triumphs, which transcend received stereotypes of Wordsworth's genius. The unassuming form of the ballad conceals an architectonic skill that recalls the lapidary art of Jonson or Horace, and that is paralleled in his own age only by the novels of Jane Austen. In the greatest of these poems he displays a mastery of tone and irony, and a delight in reducing the differences between him and his age to the focal point of a single word, that looks back to the metaphysical lyric and forward to the deliberately difficult and often ironic styles

of the disaffected poets of later generations, Baudelaire, Eliot, and Joyce. These poems are not romantic effusions, but complex, sophisticated, and deliberately pragmatic presentational structures, in which the poet himself does not appear. Of all Wordsworth's great poems, they least deserve to be described as the product of the "egotistical sublime." They present a moral vision that is profoundly and comprehensively charitable, a vision in which the swelling ankles of an old man are reconciled with what Yeats called the soul's "magnificence." And this vision is offered to the reader, not imposed upon him; Wordsworth insists that it be our own, and that we see what he cannot tell us. These poems thus argue a trust in the capacities of the reader that is itself an act of charity, and what they offer is the sense that an exalted vision can be shared. They create the "commonalty" of human feeling that Wordsworth would describe as his subject in *The Recluse*. If their music rises toward planes of feeling and thought more appropriate to the ode, the hymn, or the tragedy than the ballad, it nevertheless remains a music of humanity, which is sung in unison.

NOTES

1. Robert Mayo, "The Contemporaneity of the Lyrical Ballads," *PMLA*, 69 (1954), 486-522.
2. John Danby, *The Simple Wordsworth* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1960), pp. 38-47.
3. The poem appears in Knox's *Elegant Extracts*, and Wordsworth echoed it in the first version of *Salisbury Plain*.
4. Danby notes the play on "gentle," but he does not stress the ironies involved, or their function in the transformation of the speaker (*Simple Wordsworth*, pp. 44-45).
5. See Wordsworth's letter to Wilson (*EY*, pp. 357-358), and Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. J. Shawcross, II, 35.
6. Francis Jeffrey, "Thalaba the Destroyer" (rev.), *Edinburgh Review*, 1 (October 1802), 66.
7. Ramond praises the kindness shown by the Valaisiennes toward the idiot, and notes man's universal respect for those innocent of the crimes of the earth (*Lettres de M. William Coxe a M. W. Melmoth, sur l'Etat politique, civil et naturel de la Suisse* . . . [Paris, 1782], II, 65-66).
8. To this powerful nexus of private symbols one may add the heroine's name, Martha Ray. Her namesake, Basil Montague's mother, was, like the heroines of the Racedown poems, the victim of a crime of passion, and her grandson, little Basil Montague, was in Wordsworth's charge throughout the

Racedown years. Although the poet's use of Martha's name has been regarded as "completely inexplicable" (R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones, eds., *Lyrical Ballads* [New York: Barnes & Noble, 1963], p. 285), it clearly falls into the symbolic pattern that dominates *Salisbury Plain* and its successors.

9. Wordsworth insisted on the autonomy of the "loquacious narrator" both in 1798 and in 1800 (*PW* II, 384, 512-13), and a major focus of criticism since has been the analysis of his role in the poem. To S. M. Parrish ("The Thorn": Wordsworth's Dramatic Monologue," *Journal of English Literary History*, 24 [1957], 153-163), the primary function of the poem is the dramatic presentation of the psychology of superstition, as Wordsworth suggested (*PW* II, 512). In his brief comment, Geoffrey Hartman recognizes the narrator's ambivalence ("a mind shying from, yet drawn to, a compulsive center of interest"), but interprets him as a "caricature of Wordsworth's own imagination-in-process" (*Wordsworth's Poetry* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964], pp. 147, 148). Both John Danby (*Simple Wordsworth*, p. 58) and Albert Gérard stress his role in guiding and organizing response to the imagery and the plot of the poem (*English Romantic Poetry*, pp. 64-88). That his primary function is to exalt response to Martha Ray, however, has not been considered.

10. *Biographia Literaria* II, 36; Elsie Smith, *An Estimate of William Wordsworth by his Contemporaries*, Oxford, 1932, p. 31. Recalling Crabb Robinson, who, after "gently alluding" to the lines, confessed to Wordsworth that he could not "read them out in company" (*Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and Their Writers*, ed. Edith J. Morley [London: Dent, 1938], I, 166), James A. W. Heffernan cites their "unendurable banality" (*Wordsworth's Theory of Poetry: The Transforming Imagination* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969], p. 6).

11. See ll. 89-90, 105, 114, 155-156, and 247.

12. Geoffrey Hartman refers the telescope not to the narrator but to Wordsworth: "The captain is the ocular man in Wordsworth, searching for a sacred or secret spot, spying on nature (his telescope is a big eye)" (*Wordsworth's Poetry*, p. 148).

13. Several critics have emphasized the horror of the poem. Jonathan Wordsworth, for example, calls it a "horror story" (*Music of Humanity*, p. 76), and John Danby argues that Swinburne was "right to record 'the dreadfulfulness of a shocking reality' in his response to the poem, 'an effect of unmodified and haunting horror'" (*Simple Wordsworth*, p. 70). Albert Gérard, on the other hand, regards the poem as an attempt to construct an "attitude of pity and sympathy, focussed on the woman's misery . . . because what matters is not guilt and punishment but sorrow and compassion" (*English Romantic Poetry*, p. 81). Neither interpretation accounts for the heroic element in the poem, which carries Martha Ray, like Simon Lee and the Idiot Boy, far above pity or lurid horror.

14. Smith, *Estimate*, p. 36.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 31.

16. Francis Jeffrey, "Thalaba," pp. 66-67.

The Immortality Ode

I

CRITICISM, we know, must always be concerned with the poem itself. But a poem does not always exist only in itself: sometimes it has a very lively existence in its false or partial appearances. These simulacra of the actual poem must be taken into account by criticism; and sometimes, in its effort to come at the poem as it really is, criticism does well to allow the simulacra to dictate at least its opening moves. In speaking about Wordsworth's 'Ode: Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood,' I should like to begin by considering an interpretation of the poem which is commonly made. According to this interpretation—I choose for its brevity Dean Sperry's statement of a view which is held by many other admirable critics—the Ode is 'Wordsworth's conscious farewell to his art, a dirge sung over his departing powers.'

How did this interpretation—erroneous, as I believe—come into being? The Ode may indeed be quoted to substantiate it, but I do not think it has been drawn directly from the poem itself. To be sure, the Ode is not wholly perspicuous. Wordsworth himself seems to have thought it difficult, for in the Fenwick notes he speaks of the need for competence and attention in the reader. The difficulty does not lie in the diction, which is simple, or even in the syntax, which is sometimes obscure, but rather in certain contradictory statements which the poem makes, and in the ambiguity of some of its crucial words. Yet the erroneous interpretation I am dealing with does not arise from any intrinsic difficulty

From *The Liberal Imagination*, copyright 1942, © renewed 1970 by Lionel Trilling, pp. 129–53. Reprinted by permission of the Viking Press, Inc., and Martin Secker & Warburg Ltd.

of the poem itself but rather from certain extraneous and unexpressed assumptions which some of its readers make about the nature of the mind.

Nowadays it is not difficult for us to understand that such tacit assumptions about the mental processes are likely to lie hidden beneath what we say about poetry. Usually, despite our general awareness of their existence, it requires great effort to bring these assumptions explicitly into consciousness. But in speaking of Wordsworth one of the commonest of our unexpressed ideas comes so close to the surface of our thought that it needs only to be grasped and named. I refer to the belief that poetry is made by means of a particular poetic faculty, a faculty which may be isolated and defined.

It is this belief, based wholly upon assumption, which underlies all the speculations of the critics who attempt to provide us with explanations of Wordsworth's poetic decline by attributing it to one or another of the events of his life. In effect any such explanation is a way of *defining* Wordsworth's poetic faculty: what the biographical critics are telling us is that Wordsworth wrote great poetry by means of a faculty which depended upon his relations with Annette Vallon, or by means of a faculty which operated only so long as he admired the French Revolution, or by means of a faculty which flourished by virtue of a particular pitch of youthful sense-perception or by virtue of a certain attitude toward Jeffrey's criticism or by virtue of a certain relation with Coleridge.

Now no one can reasonably object to the idea of mental determination in general, and I certainly do not intend to make out that poetry is an unconditioned activity. Still, this particular notion of mental determination which implies that Wordsworth's genius failed when it was deprived of some single emotional circumstance is so much too simple and so much too mechanical that I think we must inevitably reject it. Certainly that we know of poetry does not allow us to refer the making of it to any single faculty. Nothing less than the whole mind, the whole man, will suffice for its origin. And such was Wordsworth's own view of the matter.

There is another unsubstantiated assumption at work in the common biographical interpretation of the Ode. This is the belief that a natural and inevitable warfare exists between the poetic faculty and the faculty by which we conceive or comprehend general ideas. Wordsworth himself did not believe in this antagonism—indeed, he held an almost

contrary view—but Coleridge thought that philosophy had encroached upon and destroyed his own powers, and the critics who speculate on Wordsworth's artistic fate seem to prefer Coleridge's psychology to Wordsworth's own. Observing in the Ode a contrast drawn between something called 'the visionary gleam' and something called 'the philosophic mind,' they leap to the conclusion that the Ode is Wordsworth's conscious farewell to his art, a dirge sung over departing powers.

I am so far from agreeing with this conclusion that I believe the Ode is not only not a dirge sung over departing powers but actually a dedication to new powers. Wordsworth did not, to be sure, realize his hopes for these new powers, but that is quite another matter.

II

As with many poems, it is hard to understand any part of the Ode until we first understand the whole of it. I will therefore say at once what I think the poem is chiefly about. It is a poem about growing; some say it is a poem about growing old, but I believe it is about growing up. It is incidentally a poem about optics and then, inevitably, about epistemology; it is concerned with ways of seeing and then with ways of knowing. Ultimately it is concerned with ways of acting, for, as usual with Wordsworth, knowledge implies liberty and power. In only a limited sense is the Ode a poem about immortality.

Both formally and in the history of its composition the poem is divided into two main parts. The first part, consisting of four stanzas, states an optical phenomenon and asks a question about it. The second part, consisting of seven stanzas, answers that question and is itself divided into two parts, of which the first is despairing, the second hopeful. Some time separates the composition of the question from that of the answer; the evidence most recently adduced by Professor de Selincourt seems to indicate that the interval was two years.

The question which the first part asks is this:

Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?

All the first part leads to this question, but although it moves in only one direction it takes its way through more than one mood. There are at least three moods before the climax of the question is reached.

The first stanza makes a relatively simple statement. 'There was a

time' when all common things seemed clothed in 'celestial light,' when they had 'the glory and the freshness of a dream.' In a poem ostensibly about immortality we ought perhaps to pause over the word 'celestial,' but the present elaborate title was not given to the poem until much later, and conceivably at the time of the writing of the first part the idea of immortality was not in Wordsworth's mind at all. Celestial light probably means only something different from ordinary, earthly, scientific light; it is a light of the mind, shining even in darkness—'by night or day'—and it is perhaps similar to the light which is praised in the invocation to the third book of *Paradise Lost*.

The second stanza goes on to develop this first mood, speaking of the ordinary, physical kind of vision and suggesting further the meaning of 'celestial.' We must remark that in this stanza Wordsworth is so far from observing a diminution of his physical senses that he explicitly affirms their strength. He is at pains to tell us how vividly he sees the rainbow, the rose, the moon, the stars, the water and the sunshine. I emphasize this because some of those who find the Ode a dirge over the poetic power maintain that the poetic power failed with the failure of Wordsworth's senses. It is true that Wordsworth, who lived to be eighty, was said in middle life to look much older than his years. Still, thirty-two, his age at the time of writing the first part of the Ode, is an extravagantly early age for a dramatic failure of the senses. We might observe here, as others have observed elsewhere, that Wordsworth never did have the special and perhaps modern sensibility of his sister or of Coleridge, who were so aware of exquisite particularities. His finest passages are moral, emotional, subjective; whatever visual intensity they have comes from his response to the object, not from his close observation of it.

And in the second stanza Wordsworth not only confirms his senses but he also confirms his ability to perceive beauty. He tells us how he responds to the loveliness of the rose and of the stars reflected in the water. He can deal, in the way of Fancy, with the delight of the moon when there are no competing stars in the sky. He can see in Nature certain moral propensities. He speaks of the sunshine as a 'glorious birth.' But here he pauses to draw distinctions from that fascinating word 'glory': despite his perception of the sunshine as a glorious birth, he knows 'That there hath past away a glory from the earth.'

Now, with the third stanza, the poem begins to complicate itself. It is *while* Wordsworth is aware of the 'optical' change in himself, the loss of the 'glory,' that there comes to him 'a thought of grief.' I emphasize the

THE IMMORTALITY ODE

word 'while' to suggest that we must understand that for some time he had been conscious of the 'optical' change *without* feeling grief. The grief, then, would seem to be coincidental with but not necessarily caused by the change. And the grief is not of long duration, for we learn that

A timely utterance gave that thought relief,
And I again am strong.

It would be not only interesting but also useful to know what that 'timely utterance' was, and I shall hazard a guess; but first I should like to follow the development of the Ode a little further, pausing only to remark that the reference to the timely utterance seems to imply that, although the grief is not of long duration, still we are not dealing with the internal experiences of a moment, or of a morning's walk, but of a time sufficient to allow for development and change of mood; that is, the dramatic time of the poem is not exactly equivalent to the emotional time.

Stanza iv goes on to tell us that the poet, after gaining relief from the timely utterance, whatever that was, felt himself quite in harmony with the joy of Nature in spring. The tone of this stanza is ecstatic, and in a way that some readers find strained and unpleasant and even of doubtful sincerity. Twice there is a halting repetition of words to express a kind of painful intensity of response: 'I feel—I feel it all,' and 'I hear, I hear, with joy I hear!' Wordsworth sees, hears, feels—and with that 'joy' which both he and Coleridge felt to be so necessary to the poet. But despite the response, despite the joy, the ecstasy changes to sadness in a wonderful modulation which quite justifies the antecedent shrillness of affirmation:

—But there's a Tree, of many, one,
A single Field which I have looked upon,
Both of them speak of something that is gone:
The Pansy at my feet
Doth the same tale repeat.

And what they utter is the terrible question:

Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
Where is it now, the glory and the dream?

III

Now, the interpretation which makes the Ode a dirge over departing powers and a conscious farewell to art takes it for granted that the visionary gleam, the glory, and the dream, are Wordsworth's names for the power by which he made poetry. This interpretation gives to the Ode a place in Wordsworth's life exactly analogous to the place that 'Dejection: An Ode' has in Coleridge's life. It is well known how intimately the two poems are connected; the circumstances of their composition makes them symbiotic. Coleridge in his poem most certainly does say that his poetic powers are gone or going; he is very explicit, and the language he uses is very close to Wordsworth's own. He tells us that upon 'the inanimate cold world' there must issue from the soul 'a light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud,' and that this glory *is* Joy, which he himself no longer possesses. But Coleridge's poem, although it responds to the first part of Wordsworth's, is not a recapitulation of it. On the contrary, Coleridge is precisely contrasting his situation with Wordsworth's. As Professor de Selincourt says in his comments on the first version of 'Dejection,' this contrast 'was the root idea' of Coleridge's ode.¹ In April of 1802 Wordsworth was a month away from his marriage to Mary Hutchison, on the point of establishing his life in a felicity and order which became his genius, while Coleridge was at the nadir of despair over his own unhappy marriage and his hopeless love for Sara, the sister of Wordsworth's fiancée. And the difference between the situations of the two friends stands in Coleridge's mind for the difference in the states of health of their respective poetic powers.

Coleridge explicitly ascribes the decay of his poetic power to his unhappiness, which worked him harm in two ways—by forcing him to escape from the life of emotion to find refuge in intellectual abstraction and by destroying the Joy which, issuing as 'a light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud,' so irradiated the world as to make it a fit object of the shaping power of imagination. But Wordsworth tells us something quite different about himself. He tells us that he has strength, that he has Joy, but still he has not the glory. In short, we have no reason to assume that, when he asks the question at the end of the fourth stanza, he means, 'Where has my creative power gone?' Wordsworth tells us how he made poetry; he says he made it out of the experience of his senses as worked upon by his contemplative intellect, but he nowhere

tells us that he made poetry out of visionary gleams, out of glories, or out of dreams.

To be sure, he writes very often about gleams. The word 'gleam' is a favorite one with him, and a glance at the Lane Cooper concordance will confirm our impression that Wordsworth, whenever he has a moment of insight or happiness, talks about it in the language of light. His great poems are about moments of enlightenment, in which the metaphoric and the literal meaning of the word are at one—he uses 'glory' in the abstract modern sense, but always with an awareness of the old concrete iconographic sense of a visible nimbus.² But this momentary and special light is the subject matter of his poetry, not the power of making it. The moments are moments of understanding, but Wordsworth does not say that they make writing poetry any easier. Indeed, in lines 59–131 of the first book of *The Prelude* he expressly says that the moments of clarity are by no means always matched by poetic creativity.

As for dreams and poetry, there is some doubt about the meaning that Wordsworth gave to the word 'dream' used as a metaphor. In 'Expostulation and Reply' he seems to say that dreaming—'dream my time away'—is a good thing, but he is ironically using his interlocutor's depreciatory word, and he really does not mean 'dream' at all. In the Peele Castle verses, which have so close a connection with the Immortality Ode, he speaks of the 'poet's dream' and makes it synonymous with 'gleam,' with 'the light that never was, on sea or land,' and with the 'consecration.' But the beauty of the famous lines often makes us forget to connect them with what follows, for Wordsworth says that gleam, light, consecration, and dream would have made an 'illusion' or, in the 1807 version, a 'delusion.' Professor Beatty reminds us that in the 1820 version Wordsworth destroyed the beauty of the lines in order to make his intention quite clear. He wrote:

and add a gleam
Of lustre known to neither sea nor land,
But borrowed from the youthful Poet's Dream.

That is, according to the terms of Wordsworth's conception of the three ages of man, the youthful Poet was, as he had a right to be, in the service of Fancy and therefore saw the sea as calm. But Wordsworth himself can now no longer see in the way of Fancy; he has, he says, 'submitted to a new control.' This seems to be at once a loss and a gain. The loss:

'A power is gone, which nothing can restore.' The gain: 'A deep distress hath humanized my Soul'; this is gain because happiness without 'humanization' 'is to be pitied, for 'tis surely blind'; to be 'housed in a dream' is to be 'at distance from the kind' (i.e., mankind). In the 'Letter to Mathetes' he speaks of the Fancy as 'dreaming'; and the Fancy is, we know, a lower form of intellect in Wordsworth's hierarchy, and peculiar to youth.

But although, as we see, Wordsworth uses the word 'dream' to mean illusion, we must remember that he thought illusions might be very useful. They often led him to proper attitudes and allowed him to deal successfully with reality. In *The Prelude* he tells how his reading of fiction made him able to look at the disfigured face of the drowned man without too much horror; how a kind of superstitious conviction of his own powers was useful to him; how, indeed, many of the most critical moments of his boyhood education were moments of significant illusion; and in *The Excursion* he is quite explicit about the salutary effects of superstition. But he was interested in dreams not for their own sake but for the sake of reality. Dreams may *perhaps* be associated with poetry, but reality *certainly* is; and reality for Wordsworth comes fullest with Imagination, the faculty of maturity. The loss of the 'dream' may be painful, but it does not necessarily mean the end of poetry.

IV

And now for a moment I should like to turn back to the 'timely utterance,' because I think an understanding of it will help get rid of the idea that Wordsworth was saying farewell to poetry. Professor Garrod believes that this 'utterance' was 'My heart leaps up when I behold,' which was written the day before the Ode was begun. Certainly this poem is most intimately related to the Ode—its theme, the legacy left by the child to the man, is a dominant theme of the Ode, and Wordsworth used its last lines as the Ode's epigraph. But I should like to suggest that the 'utterance' was something else. In line 43 Wordsworth says, 'Oh evil day! if I were sullen,' and the word 'sullen' leaps out at us as a striking and carefully chosen word. Now there is one poem in which Wordsworth says that he was sullen; it is 'Resolution and Independence.'

We know that Wordsworth was working on the first part of the Ode on the 27th of March, the day after the composition of the rainbow poem. On the 17th of June he added a little to the Ode, but what he

added we do not know. Between these two dates Wordsworth and Dorothy had paid their visit to Coleridge, who was sojourning at Keswick; during this visit Coleridge, on April 4, had written 'Dejection: an Ode,' very probably after he had read what was already in existence of the Immortality Ode. Coleridge's mental state was very bad—still, not so bad as to keep him from writing a great poem—and the Wordsworths were much distressed. A month later, on May 3, Wordsworth began to compose 'The Leech-Gatherer,' later known as 'Resolution and Independence.' It is this poem that is, I think, the timely utterance.³

'Resolution and Independence' is a poem about the fate of poets. It is also a poem about sullenness, in the sense that the people in the Fifth Circle are said by Dante to be sullen: "Sullen were we in the sweet air, that is gladdened by the sun, carrying lazy smoke within our hearts; now lie sullen here in the black mire!" This hymn they gurgle in their throats, for they cannot speak it in full words⁴—that is, they cannot now have relief by timely utterance, as they would not on earth. And 'sullenness' I take to be the creation of difficulties where none exist, the working of a self-injuring imagination such as a modern mental physician would be quick to recognize as a neurotic symptom. Wordsworth's poem is about a sudden unmotivated anxiety after a mood of great exaltation. He speaks of this reversal of feeling as something experienced by himself before and known to all. In this mood he is the prey of 'fears and fancies,' of 'dim sadness' and 'blind thoughts.' These feelings have reference to two imagined catastrophes. One of them—natural enough in a man under the stress of approaching marriage, for Wordsworth was to be married in October—is economic destitution. He reproaches himself for his past indifference to the means of getting a living and thinks of what may follow from this carefree life: 'solitude, pain of heart, distress, and poverty.' His black thoughts are led to the fate of poets 'in their misery dead,' among them Chatterton and Burns. The second specific fear is of mental distress:

We Poets in our youth begin in gladness;
But thereof come in the end despondency and madness.

Coleridge, we must suppose, was in his thoughts after the depressing Keswick meeting, but he is of course thinking chiefly of himself. It will be remembered how the poem ends, how with some difficulty of utterance the poet brings himself to speak with an incredibly old leech-

gatherer, and, taking heart from the man's resolution and independence, becomes again 'strong.'

This great poem is not to be given a crucial meaning in Wordsworth's life. It makes use of a mood to which everyone, certainly every creative person, is now and again a victim. It seems to me more likely that it, rather than the rainbow poem, is the timely utterance of which the Ode speaks because in it, and not in the rainbow poem, a sullen feeling occurs and is relieved. But whether or not it is actually the timely utterance, it is an autobiographical and deeply felt poem written at the time the Ode was being written and seeming to have an emotional connection with the first part of the Ode. (The meeting with the old man had taken place two years earlier and it is of some significance that it should have come to mind as the subject of a poem at just this time.) It is a very precise and hard-headed account of a mood of great fear and it deals in a very explicit way with the dangers that beset the poetic life. But although Wordsworth urges himself on to think of all the bad things that can possibly happen to a poet, and mentions solitude, pain of heart, distress and poverty, cold, pain and labor, all fleshly ills, and then even madness, he never says that a poet stands in danger of losing his talent. It seems reasonable to suppose that if Wordsworth were actually saying farewell to his talent in the Ode, there would be some hint of an endangered or vanishing talent in 'Resolution and Independence.' But there is none; at the end of the poem Wordsworth is resolute in poetry.

Must we not, then, look with considerable skepticism at such interpretations of the Ode as suppose without question that the 'gleam,' the 'glory,' and the 'dream' constitute the power of making poetry?—especially when we remember that at a time still three years distant Wordsworth in *The Prelude* will speak of himself as becoming a 'creative soul' (book XII, line 207; the italics are Wordsworth's own) despite the fact that, as he says (book XII, line 281), he 'sees by glimpses now.'

v

The second half of the Ode is divided into two large movements, each of which gives an answer to the question with which the first part ends. The two answers seem to contradict each other. The first issues in despair, the second in hope; the first uses a language strikingly supernatural, the second is entirely naturalistic. The two parts even differ in

the statement of fact, for the first says that the gleam is gone, whereas the second says that it is not gone, but only transmuted. It is necessary to understand this contradiction, but it is not necessary to resolve it, for from the circuit between its two poles comes much of the power of the poem.

The first of the two answers (stanzas v-viii) tells us where the visionary gleam has gone by telling us where it came from. It is a remnant of a pre-existence in which we enjoyed a way of seeing and knowing now almost wholly gone from us. We come into the world, not with minds that are merely *tabulae rasae*, but with a kind of attendant light, the vestige of an existence otherwise obliterated from our memories. In infancy and childhood the recollection is relatively strong, but it fades as we move forward into earthly life. Maturity, with its habits and its cares and its increase of distance from our celestial origin, wears away the light of recollection. Nothing could be more poignantly sad than the conclusion of this part with the heavy sonority of its last line as Wordsworth addresses the child in whom the glory still lives:

Full soon thy Soul shall have her earthly freight,
And custom lie upon thee with a weight,
Heavy as frost, and deep almost as life!

Between this movement of despair and the following movement of hope there is no clear connection save that of contradiction. But between the question itself and the movement of hope there is an explicit verbal link, for the question is: 'Whither has *fled* the visionary gleam?' and the movement of hope answers that 'nature yet remembers/What was so *fugitive*.'

The second movement of the second part of the Ode tells us again what has happened to the visionary gleam: it has not wholly fled, for it is remembered. This possession of childhood has been passed on as a legacy to the child's heir, the adult man; for the mind, as the rainbow epigraph also says, is one and continuous, and what was so intense a light in childhood becomes 'the fountain-light of all our day' and a 'master-light of all our seeing,' that is, of our adult day and our mature seeing. The child's recollection of his heavenly home exists in the recollection of the adult.

But what exactly is this fountain-light, this master-light? I am sure that when we understand what it is we shall see that the glory that Wordsworth means is very different from Coleridge's glory, which is

Joy. Wordsworth says that what he holds in memory as the guiding heritage of childhood is exactly not the Joy of childhood. It is not 'delight,' not 'liberty,' not even 'hope'—not for these, he says, 'I raise/The song of thanks and praise.' For what then does he raise the song? For this particular experience of childhood:

. . . those obstinate questionings
Of sense and outward things,
Fallings from us, vanishings;
Blank misgivings of a Creature
Moving about in worlds not realised.

He mentions other reasons for gratitude, but here for the moment I should like to halt the enumeration.

We are told, then, that light and glory consist, at least in part, of 'questionings,' 'fallings from us,' 'vanishings,' and 'blank misgivings' in a world not yet *made real*, for surely Wordsworth uses the word 'realised' in its most literal sense. In his note on the poem he has this to say of the experience he refers to:

. . . I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence, and I communed with all that I saw as something not apart from, but inherent in, my own material nature. Many times while going to school have I grasped at a wall or tree to recall myself from this abyss of idealism to the reality. At this time I was afraid of such processes.

He remarks that the experience is not peculiar to himself, which is of course true, and he says that it was connected in his thoughts with a potency of spirit which made him believe that he could never die.

The precise and naturalistic way in which Wordsworth talks of this experience of his childhood must cast doubt on Professor Garrod's statement that Wordsworth believed quite literally in the notion of pre-existence, with which the 'vanishings' experience is connected. Wordsworth is very careful to delimit the extent of his belief; he says that it is 'too shadowy a notion to be recommended to faith' as an evidence of immortality. He says that he is using the idea to illuminate another idea—using it, as he says, 'for my purpose' and 'as a poet.' It has as much validity for him as any 'popular' religious idea might have, that is to say, a kind of suggestive validity. We may regard pre-existence as being for Wordsworth a very serious conceit, vested with relative belief, intended to give a high value to the natural experience of the 'vanishings.'⁵

The naturalistic tone of Wordsworth's note suggests that we shall be doing no violence to the experience of the 'vanishings' if we consider it scientifically. In a well-known essay, 'Stages in the Development of the Sense of Reality,' the distinguished psychoanalyst Ferenczi speaks of the child's reluctance to distinguish between himself and the world and of the slow growth of objectivity which differentiates the self from external things. And Freud himself, dealing with the 'oceanic' sensation of 'being at one with the universe,' which a literary friend had supposed to be the source of all religious emotions, conjectures that it is a vestige of the infant's state of feeling before he has learned to distinguish between the stimuli of his own sensations and those of the world outside. In *Civilization and Its Discontents* he writes:

Originally the ego includes everything, later it detaches from itself the outside world. The ego-feeling we are aware of now is thus only a shrunken vestige of a more extensive feeling—a feeling which embraced the universe and expressed an inseparable connection of the ego with the external world. If we may suppose that this primary ego-feeling has been preserved in the minds of many people—to a greater or lesser extent—it would co-exist like a sort of counterpart with the narrower and more sharply outlined ego-feeling of maturity, and the ideational content belonging to it would be precisely the notion of limitless extension and oneness with the universe—the same feeling as that described by my friend as 'oceanic.'

This has its clear relation to Wordsworth's 'worlds not realised.' Wordsworth, like Freud, was preoccupied by the idea of reality, and, again like Freud, he knew that the child's way of apprehension was but a stage which, in the course of nature, would give way to another. If we understand that Wordsworth is speaking of a period common to the development of everyone, we are helped to see that we cannot identify the vision of that period with his peculiar poetic power.

But in addition to the experience of the 'vanishings' there is another experience for which Wordsworth is grateful to his childhood and which, I believe, goes with the 'vanishings' to make up the 'master-light,' the 'fountain-light.' I am not referring to the

High instincts before which our mortal Nature
Did tremble like a guilty Thing surprised,

but rather to what Wordsworth calls 'those first affections.'

I am inclined to think that with this phrase Wordsworth refers to a later stage in the child's development which, like the earlier stage in which the external world is included within the ego, leaves vestiges in the developing mind. This is the period described in a well-known passage in Book II of *The Prelude*, in which the child learns about the world in his mother's arms:

Blest the infant Babe,
 (For with my best conjecture I would trace
 Our Being's earthly progress), blest the Babe,
 Nursed in his Mother's arms, who sinks to sleep,
 Rocked on his Mother's breast; who with his soul
 Drinks in the feelings of his Mother's eye!
 For him, in one dear Presence, there exists
 A virtue which irradiates and exalts
 Objects through widest intercourse of sense.
 No outcast he, bewildered and depressed:
 Along his infant veins are interfused
 The gravitation and the filial bond
 Of nature that connect him with the world.
 Is there a flower, to which he points with hand
 Too weak to gather it, already love
 Drawn from love's purest earthly fount for him
 Hath beautified that flower; already shades
 Of pity cast from inward tenderness
 Do fall around him upon aught that bears
 Unsightly marks of violence or harm.
 Emphatically such a Being lives,
 Frail creature as he is, helpless as frail,
 An inmate of this active universe:
 For feeling has to him imparted power
 That through the growing faculties of sense,
 Doth like an agent of the one great Mind
 Create, creator and receiver both,
 Working but in alliance with the works
 Which it beholds.—Such, verily, is the first
 Poetic⁶ spirit of our human life,
 By uniform control of after years,
 In most, abated or suppressed; in some,
 Through every change of growth and of decay
 Pre-eminent till death.

The child, this passage says, does not perceive things merely as objects; he first sees them, because maternal love is a condition of his

perception, as objects-and-judgments, as valued objects. He does not learn about a flower, but about the pretty-flower, the flower that-I-want-and-that-mother-will-get-for-me; he does not learn about the bird and a broken wing but about the poor-bird-whose-wing-was-broken. The safety, warmth, and good feeling of his mother's conscious benevolence is a circumstance of his first learning. He sees, in short, with 'glory'; not only is he himself not in 'utter nakedness' as the Ode puts it, but the objects he sees are not in utter nakedness. The passage from *The Prelude* says in naturalistic language what stanza v of the Ode expresses by a theistical metaphor. Both the *Prelude* passage and the Ode distinguish a state of exile from a state of security and comfort, of at-homeness; there is (as the *Prelude* passage puts it) a 'filial bond,' or (as in stanza x of the Ode) a 'primal sympathy,' which keeps man from being an 'outcast . . . bewildered and depressed.'

The Ode and *The Prelude* differ about the source of this primal sympathy or filial bond. The Ode makes heavenly pre-existence the source, *The Prelude* finds the source in maternal affection. But the psychologists tell us that notions of heavenly pre-existence figure commonly as representations of physical prenatality—the womb is the environment which is perfectly adapted to its inmate and compared to it all other conditions of life may well seem like 'exile' to the (very literal) 'outcast.'⁷ Even the security of the mother's arms, although it is an effort to re-create for the child the old environment, is but a diminished comfort. And if we think of the experience of which Wordsworth is speaking, the 'vanishings,' as the child's recollection of a condition in which it was very nearly true that he and his environment were one, it will not seem surprising that Wordsworth should compound the two experiences and figure them in the single metaphor of the glorious heavenly pre-existence.⁸

I have tried to be as naturalistic as possible in speaking of Wordsworth's childhood experiences and the more-or-less Platonic notion they suggested to him. I believe that naturalism is in order here, for what we must now see is that Wordsworth is talking about something common to us all, the development of the sense of reality. To have once had the visionary gleam of the perfect union of the self and the universe is essential to and definitive of our human nature, and it is in that sense connected with the making of poetry. But the visionary gleam is not in itself the poetry-making power, and its diminution is right and inevitable.

That there should be ambivalence in Wordsworth's response to this diminution is quite natural, and the two answers, that of stanzas v-viii

and that of stanzas ix-xi, comprise both the resistance to and the acceptance of growth. Inevitably we resist change and turn back with passionate nostalgia to the stage we are leaving. Still, we fulfill ourselves by choosing what is painful and difficult and necessary, and we develop by moving toward death. In short, organic development is a hard paradox which Wordsworth is stating in the discrepant answers of the second part of the Ode. And it seems to me that those critics who made the Ode refer to some particular and unique experience of Wordsworth's and who make it relate only to poetical powers have forgotten their own lives and in consequence conceive the Ode to be a lesser thing than it really is, for it is not about poetry, it is about life. And having made this error, they are inevitably led to misinterpret the meaning of the 'philosophic mind' and also to deny that Wordsworth's ambivalence is sincere. No doubt it would not be a sincere ambivalence if Wordsworth were really saying farewell to poetry, it would merely be an attempt at self-consolation. But he is not saying farewell to poetry, he is saying farewell to Eden, and his ambivalence is much what Adam's was, and Milton's, and for the same reasons.⁹

To speak naturalistically of the quasi-mystical experiences of his childhood does not in the least bring into question the value which Wordsworth attached to them, for, despite its dominating theistical metaphor, the Ode is largely naturalistic in its intention. We can begin to see what that intention is by understanding the force of the word 'imperial' in stanza vi. This stanza is the second of the four stanzas in which Wordsworth states and develops the theme of the reminiscence of the light of heaven and its gradual evanescence through the maturing years. In stanza v we are told that the infant inhabits it; the Boy beholds it, seeing it 'in his joy'; the Youth is still attended by it; 'the Man perceives it die away,/And fade into the light of common day.' Stanza vi speaks briefly of the efforts made by earthly life to bring about the natural and inevitable amnesia:

Earth fills her lap with pleasures of her own;
 Yearnings she hath in her own natural kind,
 And even with something of a Mother's mind,
 And no unworthy aim,
 The homely Nurse doth all she can
 To make her Foster-child, her Inmate Man,
 Forget the glories he hath known,
 And that imperial palace whence he came.

'Imperial' suggests grandeur, dignity, and splendor, everything that stands in opposition to what, in *The Excursion*, Wordsworth was to call 'littleness.' And 'littleness' is the result of having wrong notions about the nature of man and his connection with the universe; its outcome is 'deadness.' The melancholy and despair of the Solitary in *The Excursion* are the signs of the deadness which resulted from his having conceived of man as something less than imperial: Wordsworth's idea of splendid power is his protest against all views of the mind that would limit and debase it. By conceiving, as he does, an intimate connection between mind and universe, by seeing the universe fitted to the mind and the mind to the universe, he bestows upon man a dignity which cannot be derived from looking at him in the actualities of common life, from seeing him engaged in business, in morality and politics.

Yet here we must credit Wordsworth with the double vision. Man must be conceived of as 'imperial,' but he must also be seen as he actually is in the field of life. The earth is not an environment in which the celestial or imperial qualities can easily exist. Wordsworth, who spoke of the notion of imperial pre-existence as being adumbrated by Adam's fall, uses the words 'earth' and 'earthly' in the common quasi-religious sense to refer to the things of this world. He does not make Earth synonymous with Nature, for although Man may be the true child of Nature, he is the 'Foster-child' of Earth. But it is to be observed that the foster mother is a kindly one, that her disposition is at least quasi-maternal, that her aims are at least not unworthy; she is, in short, the foster mother who figures so often in the legend of the Hero, whose real and unknown parents are noble or divine.¹⁰

Wordsworth, in short, is looking at man in a double way, seeing man both in his ideal nature and in his earthly activity. The two views do not so much contradict as supplement each other. If in stanzas v-viii Wordsworth tells us that we live by decrease, in stanzas ix-xi he tells us of the everlasting connection of the diminished person with his own ideal personality. The child hands on to the hampered adult the imperial nature, the 'primal sympathy / Which having been must ever be,' the mind fitted to the universe, the universe to the mind. The sympathy is not so pure and intense in maturity as in childhood, but only because another relation grows up beside the relation of man to Nature—the relation of man to his fellows in the moral world of difficulty and pain. Given Wordsworth's epistemology the new relation is bound to change the very aspect of Nature itself: the clouds will take a sober coloring

from an eye that hath kept watch o'er man's mortality, but a sober color is a color still.

There is sorrow in the Ode, the inevitable sorrow of giving up an old habit of vision for a new one. In shifting the center of his interest from Nature to man in the field of morality Wordsworth is fulfilling his own conception of the three ages of man which Professor Beatty has expounded so well. The shift in interest he called the coming of 'the philosophic mind,' but the word 'philosophic' does not have here either of two of its meanings in common usage—it does not mean abstract and it does not mean apathetic. Wordsworth is not saying, and it is sentimental and unimaginative of us to say, that he has become less a feeling man and less a poet. He is only saying that he has become less a youth. Indeed, the Ode is so little a farewell to art, so little a dirge sung over departing powers, that it is actually the very opposite—it is a welcome of new powers and a dedication to a new poetic subject. For if sensitivity and responsiveness be among the poetic powers, what else is Wordsworth saying at the end of the poem except that he has a greater sensitivity and responsiveness than ever before? The 'philosophic mind' has not decreased but, on the contrary, increased the power to feel.

The clouds that gather round the setting sun
Do take a sober colouring from an eye
That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality;
Another face hath been and other palms are won.
Thanks to the human heart by which we live,
Thanks to its tenderness, its joys, and fears,
To me the meanest flower that blows can give
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears.

The meanest flower is significant now not only because, like the small celandine, it speaks of age, suffering, and death, but because to a man who is aware of man's mortality the world becomes significant and precious. The knowledge of man's mortality—this must be carefully noted in a poem presumably about immortality—now replaces the 'glory' as the agency which makes things significant and precious. We are back again at optics, which we have never really left, and the Ode in a very honest fashion has come full circle.

The new poetic powers of sensitivity and responsiveness are new not so much in degree as in kind; they would therefore seem to require a new poetic subject matter for their exercise. And the very definition of the new powers seems to imply what the new subject matter must

be—thoughts that lie too deep for tears are ideally the thoughts which are brought to mind by tragedy. It would be an extravagant but not an absurd reading of the Ode that found it to be Wordsworth's farewell to the characteristic mode of his poetry, the mode that Keats called the 'egotistical sublime' and a dedication to the mode of tragedy. But the tragic mode could not be Wordsworth's. He did not have the 'negative capability' which Keats believed to be the source of Shakespeare's power, the gift of being able to be 'content with half-knowledge,' to give up the 'irritable reaching after fact and reason,' to remain 'in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts.' In this he was at one with all the poets of the Romantic Movement and after—negative capability was impossible for them to come by and tragedy was not for them. But although Wordsworth did not realize the new kind of art which seems implied by his sense of new powers, yet his bold declaration that he had acquired a new way of feeling makes it impossible for us to go on saying that the Ode was his 'conscious farewell to his art, a dirge sung over his departing powers.'

Still, was there not, after the composition of the Ode, a great falling off in his genius which we are drawn to connect with the crucial changes the Ode records? That there was a falling off is certain, although we must observe that it was not so sharp as is commonly held and also that it did not occur immediately or even soon after the composition of the first four stanzas with their statement that the visionary gleam had gone; on the contrary, some of the most striking of Wordsworth's verse was written at this time. It must be remembered too that another statement of the loss of the visionary gleam, that made in 'Tintern Abbey,' had been followed by all the superb production of the 'great decade'—an objection which is sometimes dealt with by saying that Wordsworth wrote his best work from his near memories of the gleam, and that, as he grew older and moved farther from it, his recollection dimmed and thus he lost his power: it is an explanation which suggests that mechanical and simple notions of the mind and of the poetic process are all too tempting to those who speculate on Wordsworth's decline. Given the fact of the great power, the desire to explain its relative deterioration will no doubt always be irresistible. But we must be aware, in any attempt to make this explanation, that an account of why Wordsworth ceased to write great poetry must at the same time be an account of how he once did write great poetry. And this latter account, in our present state of knowledge, we cannot begin to furnish.

NOTES

1. *Wordsworthian and Other Studies*, Oxford, 1947.
2. We recall that in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* William James speaks of the 'hallucinatory or pseudo-hallucinatory luminous phenomena, *photisms*, to use the term of the psychologists,' the 'floods of light and glory,' which characterize so many moments of revelation. James mentions one person who, experiencing the light, was uncertain of its externality.
3. I follow Professor Garrod in assuming that the 'utterance' was a poem, but of course it may have been a letter or a spoken word. And if indeed the 'utterance' does refer to 'Resolution and Independence,' it may not refer to the poem itself—as Jacques Barzun has suggested to me, it may refer to what the Leech-gatherer in the poem says to the poet, for certainly it is what the old man 'utters' that gives the poet 'relief.'
4. The Carlyle-Wicksteed translation. Dante's word is '*tristi*'; in 'Resolution and Independence' Wordsworth speaks of 'dim sadness.' I mention Dante's sinners simply to elucidate the emotion that Wordsworth speaks of, not to suggest an influence.
5. In his *Studies in the Poetry of Henry Vaughan*, a Cambridge University dissertation, Andrew Chiappe makes a similar judgment of the quality and degree of belief in the idea of pre-existence in the poetry of Vaughan and Traherne.
6. The use here of the word 'poetic' is either metaphorical and general, or it is entirely literal, that is, it refers to the root-meaning of the word, which is 'to make'—Wordsworth has in mind the creative nature of right human perception and not merely poetry.
7. 'Before born babe bliss had. Within womb won he worship. Whatever in that one case done commodiously done was.'—James Joyce, *Ulysses*. The myth of Eden is also interpreted as figuring either childhood or the womb—see below Wordsworth's statement of the connection of the notion of pre-existence with Adam's fall.
8. Readers of Ferenczi's remarkable study, *Thalassa*, a discussion, admittedly speculative but wonderfully fascinating, of unconscious racial memories of the ocean as the ultimate source of life, will not be able to resist giving an added meaning to Wordsworth's lines about the 'immortal sea/Which brought us hither' and of the unborn children who 'Sport upon the shore.' The recollection of Samuel Butler's delightful fantasy of the Unborn and his theory of unconscious memory will also serve to enrich our reading of the Ode by suggesting the continuing force of the Platonic myth.
9. Milton provides a possible gloss to several difficult points in the poem. In stanza viii, the Child is addressed as 'thou Eye among the blind,' and to the Eye are applied the epithets 'deaf and silent'; Coleridge objected to these epithets as irrational, but his objection may be met by citing the brilliant precedent of 'blind mouths' of 'Lycidas.' Again, Coleridge's question of the

THE IMMORTALITY ODE

propriety of making a master *brood* over a slave is in part answered by the sonnet 'On His Being Arrived at the Age of Twenty-three,' in which Milton expresses his security in his development as it shall take place in his 'great Task-master's eye.' Between this sonnet and the Ode there are other significant correspondences of thought and of phrase, as there also are in the sonnet 'On His Blindness.'

10. Carlyle makes elaborate play with this idea in his account of Teufelsdröckh. The fantasy that their parents are really foster parents is a common one with children, and it is to be associated with the various forms of the belief that the world is not real.

JONATHAN WORDSWORTH

Wordsworth's 'Borderers'

MY CONCERN is with what might pompously be called Wordsworth's reconciling vision, the tendency of his poetry to bring together apparently conflicting ways of thought, states of mind, modes or stages of existence: 'Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting,'

And in the meadows and the lower grounds
Was all the sweetness of a common dawn . . .
(1805, IV. 336-7)¹

that sweet mood when happy thoughts
Bring sad thoughts to the mind . . .
('Lines Written in Early Spring,' 3-4)

It is a little difficult to know where to begin, but there is a passage in MS. W of *The Prelude*, belonging to spring 1804, that has certain advantages. The draft in which it occurs never became part of 1805, but was written for the short-lived five-book *Prelude* to provide sequels to the Climbing of Snowdon—further evidence that Nature can exert a power that 'moulds . . . endues, abstracts, combines' as does the human Imagination:

One evening, walking in the public way,
A peasant of the valley where I dwelt
Being my chance companion, he stopped short

From *Proceedings of the British Academy*, LV (1969), pp. 211-228. This was the Chatterton Lecture, 19 November 1969, under the title "William Wordsworth 1770-1969." It is reprinted here, with slight revisions, by permission of the author and the British Academy.

WORDSWORTH'S BORDERERS

And pointed to an object full in view
At a small distance. 'Twas a horse, that stood
Alone upon a little breast of ground
With a clear silver moonlight sky behind.
With one leg from the ground the creature stood,
Insensible and still; breath, motion gone,
Hairs, colour, all but shape and substance gone,
Mane, ears, and tail, as lifeless as the trunk
That had no stir of breath. We paused awhile
In pleasure of the sight, and left him there,
With all his functions silently sealed up,
Like an amphibious work of Nature's hand,
A borderer dwelling betwixt life and death,
A living statue or a statued life.

It is a very characteristic piece of work. No one else could have written it—perhaps no one else could have wished to write it. The faults are Wordsworth, and the virtues are Wordsworth. It is even typically Wordsworthian that the faults should be most noticeable at the beginning and the end—in the lame (in this case positively ungrammatical) introduction and the uneasy concluding line—and the virtues in the central development of the paragraph. For want of a better word, the passage is a 'spot of time,' showing the expected progression from an opening, detailed and quite ordinary description, through the poet's heightened and heightening response, to a new, odder, and more general vision: the closest parallel is probably the account of the blind London beggar in 1805, Book VII.

Perhaps what one notices first about the poetry is its sense of wonderment:

breath, motion gone,
Hairs, colour, all but shape and substance gone,
Mane, ears, and tail, as lifeless as the trunk
That had no stir of breath . . .

The reiteration of 'gone' at the end of two consecutive lines, and the insistent return of the poet's mind to the absence of breath, convey a feeling almost of awe at the utter stillness of the animal. All the individually striking features and details—'hairs' is so much more impressive in this context that 'hair'—have been resolved into the essential facts of stillness, shape, and substance. It is a case if ever there was one of Wordsworth giving us eyes, enabling us to see what we might

normally have missed, or passed; but one can overstress the ordinariness of what is happening. What the Grasmere peasant points out to the poet is a horse in the moonlight, sleeping as horses often do sleep, on three feet: what Wordsworth points out to us is something quite different. We are not, in this case at least, laid afresh on the cool flowery lap of earth, shown an object sparkling anew with the dew-drops of childhood. We are offered an odd, personal vision, child-like only in its intensity.

As 'an amphibious work of Nature's hand,' the horse takes one back two years to the spring of 1802 and the most famous amphibian of Wordsworth's poetry, part sea-beast and part stone. It is embarrassing to have to quote lines that are so very well known, but detailed resemblances are important:

As a huge Stone is sometimes seen to lie
Couch'd on the bald top of an eminence;
Wonder to all who do the same espy
By what means it could thither come, and whence;
So that it seems a thing endued with sense:
Like a Sea-beast crawl'd forth, which on a shelf
Of rock or sand reposeth, there to sun itself.

Such seem'd this Man, not all alive nor dead,
Nor all asleep; in his extreme old age . . .
(*'Resolution and Independence,'* 64-72)

When first sighted the old man is exactly like the horse, just standing 'With all his functions silently sealed up.' The two of them inhabit a hinter-world, the Leech Gatherer 'not all alive nor dead, / Nor all asleep' and the horse specifically 'A borderer dwelling betwixt life and death.' One could, of course, say that Wordsworth was being whimsical, and really just meant that the man and horse were standing unusually still. But the Preface of 1815, though written long after the poetry it describes, suggests that at least the earlier of these two Borderers was created with considerable care—

The stone is endowed with something of the power of life to approximate it to the sea-beast; and the sea-beast stripped of some of its vital qualities to assimilate it to the stone; which intermediate image is thus treated for the purpose of bringing the original image, that of the stone, to a nearer resemblance to the figure and condition of the aged Man; who is divested of so much of the indications of life and motion as to

bring him to the point where the two objects unite and coalesce in just comparison.²

—and there are in fact many other examples in Wordsworth's poetry of this preoccupation with border-states.

I should like at this stage to mention just one more, this time not a horse, not an aged man, but a butterfly:

I've watch'd you now a full half-hour,
Self-pois'd upon that yellow flower;
And little Butterfly! indeed
I know not if you sleep, or feed.
How motionless!—not frozen seas
More motionless! and then
What joy awaits you, when the breeze
Hath found you out among the trees,
And calls you forth again.

('To a Butterfly,' 1-9)

'not frozen seas/More motionless'—Coleridge might well have used the comparison in *Biographia Literaria* to exemplify 'Mental bombast,' 'thoughts and images too great for the subject';³ but this image of latent power, though ludicrous when applied to an insect, has interesting general implications. The butterfly makes especially clear that these figures are enviable, not just for their peacefulness, but because in their extreme passivity they approach, or seem to approach, a border-line which is the entrance to another world.⁴ The analogy of Wordsworth himself is obvious. Clearly there is a sense in which the joy that awaits the butterfly among the trees is the same as the joy that enables the poet of *Tintern Abbey*, after being similarly 'laid asleep in body,' to 'see into the life of things.' But it is important to notice that these Borderers emerge in Wordsworth's poetry only when he has himself lost the power—or lost the faith that he has the power—of which they are symbolic.

There are, of course, figures from the earlier period who can broadly be described as Borderers, the Old Cumberland Beggar, for instance, and closely related Old Man Travelling (both going back to 1797), or, in a very different genre, the Idiot Boy of spring 1798. But these are essentially distinct from the fully symbolic figures that I have been discussing. The point can be quickly made by placing the Old Man Travelling beside the London Beggar of 1804:

He travels on, and in his face, his step,
 His gait, in one expression: every limb,
 His look and bending figure, all bespeak
 A man who does not move with pain, but moves
 With thought—He is insensibly subdued
 To settled quiet: he is one by whom
 All effort seems forgotten, one to whom
 Long patience has such mild composure given,
 That patience now doth seem a thing, of which
 He hath no need. He is by nature led
 To peace so perfect, that the young behold
 With envy, what the Old Man hardly feels.
 ('Old Man Traveling,' 3-14)

Pain has gone, effort has gone, patience—the most passive of virtues—is no longer needed; and in the last enigmatic lines it seems that even the peace, so enviable to others, is hardly felt by the man himself. And yet, despite this whittling away, what remains is a human-being, not a symbol. The poet, one feels, is emotionally concerned; and the poem seeks to understand, not merely to define, the old man's state of mind. By 1804 all this is changed. Silent, propped and blind, the London beggar is completely an object, save that a label attached to his chest claims for him human attributes—a story and a name:

lost

Amid the moving pageant, 'twas my chance
 Abruptly to be smitten with the view
 Of a blind beggar, who, with upright face,
 Stood propped against a wall, upon his chest
 Wearing a written paper, to explain
 The story of the man, and who he was.
 (1805, VII. 609-15)

The beggar exists not for himself, but for his impact on the poet. 'My mind,' Wordsworth writes, 'did at this spectacle turn round/As with the might of waters' (ibid. 616-17). We are back in the world where butterflies can be compared to frozen seas, where sleeping horses become 'amphibious works of Nature's hand,' or where—to use the case of 'mental bombast' that did irritate Coleridge especially—a child can be the 'best Philosopher,' a 'Mighty Prophet, Seer blest.'

What the Borderers of these different periods do have in common is that they offer a way of talking in specific terms about Wordsworth's

general vision. I wish to suggest that the Borderers change because the vision they reflect remains the same. At this point it is necessary to insist on dates. 'Old Man Travelling' and the first drafts of 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' go back to the early summer of 1797. Wordsworth and his sister were still at Racedown in Dorset. He had not yet come under the influence of Coleridge; and, in particular, had not yet taken over from him his Unitarian belief in 'the one life within us and abroad.'⁵ Thinking backwards from the summer of 1798, or indeed looking at the poem in its context of *Lyrical Ballads*, one can easily read 'Old Man Travelling' in terms of the One Life; but it is not relevant to do so. The 'peace so perfect' which the old man achieves is enviable and admirable, the result of approaching, if not transcending, the limits of ordinary existence; but it does not consist, as does the joy of *Tintern Abbey*, in the presence of a shared life-force. Already there is the Wordsworthian instinct that for those who can reach beyond everyday needs and emotions a harmony is to be found; but as yet there is no doctrinal basis for the poet's intuitions.

For much of Wordsworth's poetry, of course, no such basis was needed. Poems continued to depend on the instinct that had supported 'Old Man Travelling,' and required no philosophical justification. 'The Idiot Boy,' for instance, was written at the height of Wordsworth's belief in the One Life, yet Johnny is a Borderer who has no need of its support. It is not difficult to think of him in pantheist terms as he sits on his horse, holly-bough in hand, and 'idle all for very joy'—

while the pony moves his legs,
In Johnny's left hand you may see,
The green bough's motionless and dead;
The moon that shines above his head
Is not more still and mute than he.

('The Idiot Boy,' 87-91)

—or again, when Betty finds him towards the end of the poem at the waterfall, totally unaware of the human situation that surrounds him, totally involved in the natural scene; but whether one does think in these terms or not is a matter of personal choice. And yet, however easily and naturally it took place, however small the effect it had on certain kinds of poetry, the acceptance of pantheism is the one major intellectual event in Wordsworth's life. Beside it even the early commitment to the French Revolution is insignificant, and later changes,

religious and political, are of no consequence at all. Perhaps one should be more specific. It was not so much the fact as the quality of Wordsworth's belief that had such far-reaching effects and implications. For a brief period he not only believed that 'There [was] an active principal alive/In all things'—a view that would have been accepted by many in the 1790s⁶—but went on from this quite ordinary position to assert a universe of blessedness and love, based on the assumption that the individual could perceive as well as share 'the life of things.' For Wordsworth himself, as well as for the Pedlar who tells the story of *The Ruined Cottage*, it was true in February 1798 to say that

in all things
He saw one life, and felt that it was joy.⁷

By the end of the year all this has changed. There is an entirely new Wordsworth, the Wordsworth of the Lucy Poems and 1799, Part I. Five months only have passed since *Tintern Abbey* and its great affirmation of his faith in the One Life, but pantheism in any full sense of the word has almost disappeared from his writing, and with it the characteristic optimism of 1798, the 'cheerful faith that all which we behold/Is full of blessings' (*Tintern Abbey*, 134-5). There are no more trances, moments of exaltation in which the individual enters into direct contact with the principle of being. And yet curiously, obstinately, the reconciling vision remains:

A slumber did my spirit seal,
I had no human fears:
She seem'd a thing that could not feel
The touch of earthly years.

No motion has she now, no force
She neither hears nor sees
Roll'd round in earth's diurnal course,
With rocks and stones and trees!

The poem suffers from being so famous that it is difficult to think about, but it shows very clearly the change that has taken place. As David Ferry puts it in *The Limits of Mortality*, the Lucy Poems symbolize Wordsworth's relation to the eternal.⁸ It is this move into a world of symbols that I wish to stress. 'A Slumber . . .' in fact opens with an actual loss of bodily awareness, but the poem then goes on to

present what is, or can be seen as, a re-enactment of the process in symbolic terms. In her death Lucy achieves the harmony to which the poet himself had once attained.⁹ Or perhaps one should say she achieves a state which is essentially like his in one respect, essentially distinct in another. To claim that Wordsworth's insight is now into a world of death would be too literal-minded—after all he had used the metaphor of dying in *Tintern Abbey* ('laid asleep/In body, and become a living soul')—but the poem has lost its immediate relevance to life. The Wordsworth of *Tintern Abbey* had been, or assumed himself to be, firmly anchored in the ordinary world. His seeing 'into the life of things' had been 'that serene and blessed mood,' a mood which others would know about too, and from which he had returned with a message of optimism applicable to all. Now, by contrast, he has moved very obviously into the realm of wish-fulfilment.

It is the same with the companion-poem, 'Three years she grew,' though in this case Lucy is an active rather than a passive Borderer—or, to be more precise, she crosses the border into an active rather than a passive harmony. She dies, in fact, into a life that she could perfectly well have lived:

She shall be sportive as the fawn
That wild with glee across the lawn
Or up the mountain springs,
And hers shall be the breathing balm,
And hers the silence and the calm
Of mute insensate things.

.
And vital feelings of delight
Shall rear her form to stately height,
Her virgin bosom swell,
Such thoughts to Lucy I will give
While she and I together live
Here in this happy dell.

('Three years she grew,' 13-18, 31-6)

It is not, of course, a lover with whom Lucy will share 'this happy dell,' but Nature, in effect Death:

Thus Nature spake—The work was done—
How soon my Lucy's race was run!
She died, and left to me

This heath, this calm and quiet scene,
The memory of what has been,
And never more will be.

(Ibid. 37-42)

What put it into Wordsworth's head to write these beautiful, elegiac love-poems one will never know, but the answer is probably not love. Just as Hopkins's Margaret grieves for herself not Goldengrove, so one feels that there is a sense in which Wordsworth is the subject of his own lament. Less than a year before he had believed passionately in a harmony accessible to all: now he could envisage it only in a private other-world of abstraction. He had known what it was to share, or to believe he shared, 'the breathing balm . . . the silence and the calm/Of mute insensate things' and was now left with 'The memory of what [had] been/And never more [would] be.' But it would be wrong to overstress the feeling of personal loss. More remarkable as one reads is the delicacy of the imaginative harmony that has replaced the actuality of the previous year. Wordsworth's beliefs have changed, or certainly are no longer felt with the same immediacy, but the intuition of order, the reconciling vision, is as powerful as before. Indeed it is perhaps more impressive now that it stands on its own, the support of dogma gone.

If one moves across to 1799, Part I, it is to find a very similar process taking place. Wordsworth is not creating symbol-worlds, but he is none the less making acceptable patterns out of the past. In *The Pedlar*,¹⁰ of March 1798, Wordsworth had used childhood recollections to form an exemplum of the One Life, of course radically changing the facts and time-sequence of his past experience in order to do so. Now, instead of forcing childhood to illustrate an ideal, he is seen returning to it for more personal reasons. His mood is partly one of self-reproach for his present failure to get down to work—

Was it for this
That one, the fairest of all rivers, loved
To blend his murmurs with my nurse's song . . . ?
For this, didst thou,
O Derwent . . . ?

(1799, I. 1-3, 6-7)

—but what Wordsworth really seems to be asking is why the memories of childhood should hold such special attraction and power. In the

early manuscripts one sees him trying to construct from his experiences the over-all pattern which intuitively he feels must exist. The new pattern has to find room for all the conflicting, un-ideal moods which *The Pedlar* had excluded, for stealth and guilt (the stealing of boats and birds) and also for unthinking normality (skating, even noughts and crosses).

Two reconciling principles are invoked, the first being an incongruous literary pantheism

Ye powers of earth, ye genii of the springs,
And ye that have your voices in the clouds,
And ye that are familiars of the lakes
And of the standing pools, I may not think
A vulgar hope was yours when ye employed
Such ministry . . .

(1799, I. 186-91)

Wordsworth has retreated from the single pervasive life-force of *The Pedlar* and *Tintern Abbey* to a fragmented, sub-classical pantheism of river-gods and geniuses. To what extent this stood for the One Life in his own mind it is impossible to say, but one suspects a weakening of conviction as well as the evident new desire to be conventionally acceptable. The process of breaking the One Life down into tutelary spirits is at its most obvious when early in the poem Wordsworth is faced with explaining why so many of his memories should be disturbing, unharmonious. At this stage he makes a distinction between the 'quiet powers,/Retired, and seldom recognized' with whom he himself had rarely held communion, and others

who use,
Yet haply aiming at the self-same end,
Severer interventions, ministry
More palpable . . .

(1799, I. 73-4, 77-80)

adding in conclusion, 'and of their school was I.' In effect the lines perform a double function. Locally they are a means of stringing together the birdnesting episode and that of the stolen boat: in general terms, they justify the inclusion of any memory that happens to have survived (or that Wordsworth happens recently to have written about), on the grounds that the poem will reflect the order inherent in the divinely favoured childhood it describes. *The Pedlar* and *Tintern*

Abbey are religious poems, poems inspired and sustained by the belief they record: 1799, Part I is much more subdued in its religious affirmation, and uses it at least partly as a structural device to connect different blocks of poetry and kinds of past experience. The linking-sections record Wordsworth's sense of a total well-being, but despite the categorical tone—'I believe that there are spirits . . . '—they are a long way from having the passionate conviction of 1798.

Not that Wordsworth puts all his emphasis on the ministrations of a spirit-world. Alongside comes the assertion of a new, purely humanist, reconciling principle—not yet Imagination, but memory. The moments recalled have a vividness which is of course seen as the result of imaginative heightening; Wordsworth's concern for the present, however, is with their effect upon the mind, not the creative processes they imply. Part I of 1799 stands between the two dogmatisms of the *One Life* and the Imagination, both originating in Coleridge. For a moment Wordsworth is seen working—one might almost say, muddling—on his own towards the over-all pattern which he and his poetry so obviously need. He arrives at the famous statement, 'There are in our existence spots of time . . . ' exiled in 1805 to Book XI, but found in 1799 at the centre of Part I. In its early form the passage is far less inflated than it becomes in 1805 and 1850, and says what it has to say in nine lines instead of nineteen:

There are in our existence spots of time
Which with distinct preeminence retain
A fructifying virtue, whence, depressed
By trivial occupations and the round
Of ordinary intercourse, our minds
(Especially the imaginative power)
Are nourished and invisibly repaired;
Such moments chiefly seem to have their date
In our first childhood.

(1799, I. 288-96)

In *Tintern Abbey* passing responses had similarly been held to contain potential for the future, but the poet's memories had been of a landscape beautiful in itself and permeated by the *One Life*. Now it seems that not only pleasant, but also painful experiences can be fruitful, and even those which at the time seem to hold no significance at all. In returning over the years to a specific moment, the mind both establishes it in the memory and guarantees its future importance. Words-

worth is in effect re-writing *Tintern Abbey* in untranscendental terms. As before, it is the memory that lightens

the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world . . .
(*Tintern Abbey*, 40-1)

but the process has been secularized. The pantheist claims have gone, and what is more, there has been no attempt to replace them. Wordsworth asserts that his early memories have a restorative power, but offers no reason why this should be so: in the context of this essay one explanation at least should have emerged. Though varying in mood from the tranquillity achieved in 'There was a Boy' and the skating episode, to the guilty apprehension of 'unknown modes of being' or the sense of 'visionary dreariness' (the boat-stealing and murderer's gibbet), the 'spots of time' have the power to strengthen and reassure because they stand in the poet's mind for the ability of the individual to transcend the limits of ordinary experience. Wordsworth is plainly craving for the certainty felt by the Borderer of *The Pedlar* and *Tintern Abbey* whom he had briefly thought himself to be.

So much for Goslar, and the strange, powerful, in many ways distinct, poetry of winter 1798-9. The later pattern, established in 1799, Part II at the end of the year, shows Wordsworth looking for harmony, intuitively believing in it, occasionally asserting its existence, but never able to re-enter the *Tintern Abbey* world of conviction. One way of seeing how far he has moved in terms of belief, and how little his instincts have changed, is to compare 'The Simplon Pass' of 1804 with the very different evocation of a border state of mind in *The Pedlar* of 1798:

The immeasurable height
Of woods decaying, never to be decayed,
The stationary blasts of waterfalls,
And everywhere along the hollow rent
Winds thwarting winds, bewildered and forlorn,
The torrents shooting from the clear blue sky,
The rocks that muttered close upon our ears—
Black drizzling crags that spake by the way side
As if a voice were in them—the sick sight
And giddy prospect of the raving stream,
The unfettered clouds, and region of the heavens,
Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light,

Were all like workings of one mind, the features
Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree,
Characters of the great apocalypse,
The types and symbols of eternity,
Of first, and last, and midst, and without end.

(1805, VI. 556-72)

It is unquestionably great poetry, perhaps the most impressive example of what I have called Wordsworth's reconciling vision, and yet the claims it makes amount to very little. The landscape is treated in animist terms (torrents shoot, rocks mutter, crags speak), but this is mere poeticism beside the living and sharing world of *The Pedlar*:

The ocean and the earth beneath him lay
In gladness and deep joy. The clouds were touched,
And in their silent faces did he read
Unutterable love. Sound needed none,
Nor any voice of joy: his spirit drank
The spectacle. Sensation, soul and form
All melted into him. They swallowed up
His animal being. In them did he live,
And by them did he live. They were his life.
In such access of mind, in such high hour
Of visitation from the living God,
He did not feel the God, he felt his works.
Thought was not: in enjoyment it expired.
Such hour by prayer or praise was unprofaned;
He neither prayed, nor offered thanks or praise;
His mind was a thanksgiving to the power
That made him. It was blessedness and love.¹¹

Coleridge puts his finger (undeliberately, of course) on the difference between these two passages in his letter to William Sotheby of 10 September 1802:

Nature has her proper interest; & he will know what it is, who believes & feels, that every Thing has a Life of it's own, & that we are all *one Life*. A Poet's *Heart & Intellect* should be *combined, intimately combined & unified*, with the great appearances in Nature—& not merely held in solution & loose mixture with them, in the shape of formal Similies.¹²

At the time of *The Pedlar* and *Tintern Abbey* Wordsworth's heart and intellect had been intimately combined and unified with Nature: by

1804, though still instinctively reaching towards a total harmony, he is reduced to the level of formal simile. The different parts of the landscape are 'like workings of one mind,' and the clauses that follow are all in apposition. One may forget as the poetry mounts through 'Characters of the great apocalypse' to its climax in 'The types and symbols of eternity,' but however impressive are Wordsworth's analogies, analogy they remain.

In 1805, Book VI 'The Simplon Pass' comes, of course, immediately after the famous apostrophe to Imagination. In the years 1799-1805 as *The Prelude* was expanded to two Books (or Parts), then reconstituted as five and finally thirteen, Imagination was the reconciling principle on which Wordsworth increasingly pinned his hopes. In the apostrophe he restates, not for the first time, the central experience of *Tintern Abbey*:

in such strength
Of usurpation, in such visitings
Of awful promise, when the light of sense
Goes out in flashes that have shewn to us
The invisible world, doth greatness make abode,
There harbours whether we be young or old.
Our destiny, our nature, and our home
Is with infinitude—and only there;
With hope it is, hope that can never die,
Effort, and expectation, and desire,
And something evermore about to be.

(1805, VI. 532-42)

'The invisible world,' 'destiny,' 'infinitude,' 'hope,' 'expectation,' Wordsworth's language cries out for a transcendental interpretation, but at this period he has none to offer; and the less quoted lines that follow make it clear that in this border-state, the mind is 'blest in thoughts/That are their own perfection and reward' (ibid. 543-46), that the sense of 'something evermore about to be' is infinitely valuable, but not a religious experience. A year later, when the death of his favourite brother, John, has made it necessary for him to accept the doctrine of an afterlife,¹³ Wordsworth permits himself a good deal more wishful-thinking. Understandably looking for some means of pulling together his long and rambling poem, he seizes on Imagination, calling it by some fairly inconsequential names—'absolute strength,' 'clearest insight,' 'amplitude of mind,' 'reason in her most

exalted mood'—¹⁴ claiming that it has been at once the subject and the guide of his 'long labour,' and using it to lead up to a final Christian affirmation:

And lastly, from its progress have we drawn
The feeling of life endless, the great thought
By which we live, infinity and God.

(1805, XIII. 175-7)

For the second time—the third, if one takes into account the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*—Coleridge has become the dominant influence. In 1798 Wordsworth had taken over the One Life, now he takes over a conveniently, if rather vaguely, transcendentalized Imagination, defining it in terms which not only anticipate *Biographia Literaria* in detail, but emphasize once again how much he needed a shared philosophical basis to explain and support his personal vision.

I should like to conclude with one last Borderer—the child of the *Intimations Ode* who so offended Coleridge. In the two-Part *Prelude* Wordsworth had returned to childhood as the period of his most vital memories. These had seemed to him to be inherently 'fructifying' (his later word was 'vivifying,' life-giving), and the fact that they had brought out his poetic inspiration had appeared to prove them so. Childhood came to stand in his mind for creative power as well as lost, unattainable, innocent vision, until, in a final desperate assertion, Wordsworth contradicted the credible Jungian babe who in 1799 had drawn strength from his mother's love,¹⁵ and went back to pre-existence. It was logical, but crazy, and left the child as the ultimate Borderer, for whom no claims could be too high:

Thou, whose exterior semblance doth belie
Thy Soul's immensity;
Thou best Philosopher, who yet dost keep
Thy heritage, thou Eye among the blind,
That, deaf and silent, read'st the eternal deep,
Haunted for ever by the eternal mind,—
Mighty Prophet! Seer blest!
On whom those truths do rest,

Which we are toiling all our lives to find . . .

(*Intimations Ode*, 108-16)

On the face of it, 'Mental bombast' seems a fair assessment: beautiful as much of the poem is, one can scarcely deny that in this central pas-

sage the thoughts and images are 'too great for the subject.' But Coleridge's analysis is absurdly literal-minded ('Children at this age give us no such information . . .') and, its suggestion of pantheism seems deliberately obtuse: 'In what sense can the magnificent attributes, above quoted, be appropriated to a *child*, which would not make them equally suitable to a *bee*, or a *dog*, or a *field of corn* . . . ?'¹⁶ It is fine writing, but not very sympathetic criticism. The child has no reference to ordinary experience,¹⁷ and the time had long since passed when the One Life would have been invoked in his support. He is simply the most far-fetched of all Wordsworth's symbols of the possibility for which he longed, and in which he had once briefly believed, of direct contact with another world of truth.

For Wordsworth the man, these tensions were soon to be relieved by his acceptance of orthodox Christian thought: for Wordsworth the poet, of course, the tensions—the 'Effort, and expectation, and desire'—had been all to the good.

NOTES

1. *Prelude* quotations are from Wordsworth, *The Prelude*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth, Stephen Gill and M. H. Abrams (Norton Critical Edition, 1975), and refer either to the poem in two parts ('1799'), or to the version in thirteen Books ('1805'). Quotations of poems that Wordsworth himself published are from the earliest printed versions.

2. *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (3 vols., Oxford, 1974), iii. 33.

3. S. T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. J. Shawcross (2 vols., Oxford, 1907), ii. 109—Coleridge's italics.

4. In some ways the most surprising of Wordsworth's Borderers is the city of London; cf. 'Composed upon Westminster Bridge' (1802).

5. Cf. my discussion of Coleridge's early influence on Wordsworth in *The Music of Humanity* (London, 1969), especially pp. 190–201.

6. 'In his fundamental belief that the physical world is a "world of feeling and of life" Wordsworth was neither isolated nor eccentric.' H. W. Piper, *The Active Universe* (London, 1962), p. 115. Piper holds that Wordsworth was the dominant influence on Coleridge at this period, when it is quite clear that the reverse is true, but his discussion of the beliefs current in the 1790s is extremely valuable. Wordsworth's blank verse Fragment 'There is an active principal . . .' is found in MS. Verse 18A of 1799–1800 but was

composed in February–March 1798. In an adapted form it finally became part of *Excursion* IX: see *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. E. de Selincourt and H. Darbishire (5 vols., Oxford, 1940–9), v. 286–7, 290–1 and *app. crit.*

7. *Poetical Works*, v. 385, ll. 251–2—my italics.

8. David Ferry, *The Limits of Mortality* (Middletown, 1959), p. 79.

9. Hugh Sykes Davies has put forward the view that the poem is not about Lucy at all. No girl is named, of course, and the pronoun 'She' in line 3 could well refer back to the poet's spirit in line 1. ('Another New Poem by Wordsworth,' Hugh Sykes Davies, *Essays in Criticism* XV (1965), 135–61.) There are objections to such a reading (Wordsworth might have attributed feeling, hearing and sight to his spirit, but more probably didn't), but what is interesting is that there should be so little opposition between what would appear at first to be two radically different ways of looking at the poem. As regards *meaning* they come to the same thing: one's concern is merely as to whether the poet is talking directly or in symbolic terms about his own experience. In fact, I suspect that the eight lines of 'A Slumber . . .' originally comprised stanzas four and five of 'She dwelt among th' untrodden ways,' the poem being split in half when Wordsworth realized that it could stand as two discrete units, as was 'Lines Written near Richmond' in *Lyrical Ballads* 1800. 'She' in line 3 of 'A Slumber . . .' would then refer back naturally to 'Lucy' in line 10 of 'She dwelt . . .'

10. I use the name to indicate the expansion of *The Ruined Cottage* which deals with the background of the narrator, as opposed to the central story of Margaret, the bulk of which belongs to the summer of 1797. In MS. Verse 18A Wordsworth himself divided the two halves, though it is not clear how long they remained separate in his mind. A text of *The Pedlar* is offered in *The Music of Humanity*, pp. 169–83.

11. *Poetical Works*, v. 382, ll. 125–41. (*The Music of Humanity*, pp. 175–6, ll. 98–114.)

12. *The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. E. L. Griggs (6 vols., Oxford, 1956–71), ii. 864—Coleridge's italics.

13. Cf. the agonized rationalizing in Wordsworth's letter to Sir George Beaumont of 12 March, 1805, a month after his brother was drowned: 'Why have we a choice and a will, and a notion of justice and injustice, enabling us to be moral agents? Why have we sympathies that make the best of us so afraid of inflicting pain and sorrow, which yet we see dealt about so lavishly by the supreme governor? . . . Would it be blasphemy to say that upon the supposition of the thinking principle being destroyed by death, however inferior we may be to the great Cause and ruler of things, we have *more of love* in our Nature than he has? The thought is monstrous; and yet how to get rid of it except upon the supposition of *another* and a *better world* I do not see. As to my departed Brother who leads our minds at present to these reflections, he walked all his life pure among many impure . . . So good must be better; so high must be destined to be higher.' (*The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. E. de Selincourt, 2nd ed. *The Early Years 1787–1805*, revised by Chester L. Shaver, Oxford, 1967, 556)—Wordsworth's italics.

14. I have discussed some of the more far-fetched recent claims about

Imagination in an essay on 'The Climbing of Snowdon' (1805, XIII. 1-116), *Bicentenary Wordsworth Studies in Memory of John Alban Finch*, ed. Jonathan Wordsworth (Ithaca, 1970), 468-74.

15.

the babe who sleeps
Upon his mother's breast, who, when his soul
Claims manifest kindred with an earthly soul,
Doth gather passion from his mother's eye.

day by day
Subjected to the discipline of love,
His organs and recipient faculties
Are quickened, are more vigorous; his mind spreads . . .
(1799, II. 270-3, 280-3)

16. *Biographia Literaria*, ed. cit. ii. 112-13—Coleridge's italics.

17. He can have very little even to the poet's own not at all ordinary 'recollections of early childhood'—cf. Wordsworth's note on the *Ode*, dictated to Isabella Fenwick in 1843. It is one thing to remember being unable to admit the idea of death, or recall grasping at walls to escape the 'abyss of idealism,' and another to portray a child as burdened by eternal truths.

Coleridge's Conversation Poems

A YOUNG poet whom I love has just left my house and driven away in the soft darkness of a spring night, to the remote cottage in the Delaware valley where he meditates a not thankless Muse. Before he came I was in despair, sitting bewildered with my heaps of notes on Coleridge spread before me, having much to say, but not knowing how to begin. Now it should be easier, for one fire kindleth another, and our talk was of friendship and poetry. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, to those who know him well, exists in three modes, as Philosopher, Poet, Friend. If the truth were told, we should all be obliged to admit that the Philosopher escapes us. We hear his voice and enter the room where he is speaking, only to see his retreating figure down some dim corridor. 'Aids to Reflection,' 'Table Talk,' and other echoes of his speech yield merely a confused murmur, baffling, and the more exasperating because the tones are in themselves melodious. It was an unprofitable heritage that Coleridge left to his disciple, Joseph Henry Green, and to his daughter Sara and her husband, the task of arranging and publishing his philosophical writings and the records of his innumerable monologues. In Green's case the labor lasted twenty-eight years. The sum of all this toil is neither a rounded system nor a clear view of anything in particular. They tried earnestly to catch the vanishing metaphysician, but in vain.

It is the opinion of many that Coleridge as Poet is almost equally an evanescent shadow; and though the many are in this quite mistaken, they have some excuse for thinking thus, because his fulfilment falls far

From *Spirit of Delight*, copyright 1928 by Henry Holt and Co., Inc., copyright 1956 by George McLean Harper, pp. 3-27. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

short of his promise. But they fail to appreciate how very great, after all, the fulfilment is. The causes of this injustice to Coleridge the Poet are the splendor of the three poems of his which everybody knows and admires, and also the habit of regarding him as a mere satellite of Wordsworth, or at least as Wordsworth's weaker brother. Those who are so dazzled by 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,' 'Kubla Khan,' and 'Christabel,' that all the rest of Coleridge's poetry seems to them colorless, are invited to reopen his book, but first to read J. Dykes Campbell's *Life of him* or the collection of his wonderful letters edited by the late Ernest Hartley Coleridge, his grandson; and I wish to direct the attention of those from whom he is obscured by the greater glory of Wordsworth to a group of poems which can be compared only to the 'Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey.'

These are his *Poems of Friendship*. They cannot be even vaguely understood unless the reader knows what persons Coleridge has in mind. They are, for the most part, poems in which reference is made with fine particularity to certain places. They were composed as the expression of feelings which were occasioned by quite definite events. Between the lines, when we know their meaning, we catch glimpses of those delightful people who formed the golden inner circle of his friends in the days of his young manhood: Charles Lamb, his oldest and dearest, Mary Lamb, practical Tom Poole, William and Dorothy Wordsworth in their days of clearest vision and warmest enthusiasm, and in the later pieces Mrs. Wordsworth and Sarah Hutchinson her young sister. They may all be termed, as Coleridge himself names one or two of them, *Conversation Poems*, for even when they are soliloquies the sociable man who wrote them could not even think without supposing a listener. They require and reward considerable knowledge of his life and especially the life of his heart.

This is not so certainly the case with his three famous *Mystery Poems*, in which the spellbound reader sees visions and hears music which float in from a magic realm and float out again into unfathomable space. Their perfection is not of this world nor founded on history or circumstance. No knowledge of their origin or mechanism can increase their beauty or enrich their charm. To attempt to account for them, to write footnotes about them, if it were hoped thereby to make them more powerful in their effect upon the imagination, would be ridiculous and pedantic, however fruitful of knowledge and interest the exercise might be.

While the Philosopher has wandered away into a vague limbo of un-

finished projects and the Poet of 'Christabel' and its companion stars can only gaze in mute wonder upon the constellation he fixed in the heavens, the Poet of the Friendly Pieces lingers among us and can be questioned. We owe it to him and to ourselves to appreciate them. It is unfair to his genius that he should be represented in most anthologies of English verse only by the Mystery Poems, and that those who read the Poems of Friendship should so generally be ignorant of their meaning. It is unfair to ourselves that we should refuse the companionship of the most open-hearted of men, a generous spirit, willing to reveal to us the riches of his mind, a man whom all can understand and no one can help loving. There is not so much kindness, humor, wisdom, and frankness offered to most of us in the ordinary intercourse of life that we can afford to decline the outstretched hand of Coleridge.

Poetry draws mankind together, breaks down barriers, relieves loneliness, shows us ourselves in others and others in ourselves. It is the friendly art. It ignores time and space. National, racial, and secular differences fall at its touch, which is the touch of kinship, and when we feel this we laugh shamefacedly at our pretensions, timidities, and reserves. Everything in antiquity is antiquated except its art and especially its poetry. That is scarcely less fresh than when it fell first from living lips. The religion of the ancients is to us superstition, their science childishness, but their poetry is as valid and vital as our own. We appropriate it, and it unites us with our fathers.

'One precious, tender-hearted scroll
Of pure Simonides'

shines through the mist more brightly than the Nicomachean Ethics or the Constitution of Athens. What is most enduring in the Old Testament is the humanity revealed here and there in veins of poetry, not only as psalms and prophecies but gleaming out from the historical books. It is the nature of all great poetry to open and bring together the hearts of men. And few poets have so generously given themselves out to us as Coleridge. The gift is rare and wonderful because he was a very good man, even more than because of his marvellous mind. When I say he was good, I mean that he was loving. However many other kinds of goodness there may be, this is the indispensable element. Some one has been trying to persuade me that artists should abandon themselves wholly to art. If this means that they should dissociate themselves from their fellow men who have the misfortune to be mere ordinary mortals,

or should neglect the duties and forgo the pleasures that other people perform and enjoy, it is a heresy at which the Muse of Literary History shrugs her shoulders.

The Poems of Friendship make yet another claim on our attention: they are among the supreme examples of a peculiar kind of poetry. Others not unlike them, though not surpassing them, are Ovid's 'Cum subit illius tristissima noctis imago,' and several of the Canti of Leopardi. Some passages in Cowper's 'Task' resemble them in tone. Poignancy of feeling, intimacy of address, and ease of expression are even more perfectly blended in Coleridge's poems than in any of these.

The compositions which I denominate Poems of Friendship or Conversation Poems are 'The Eolian Harp,' 'Reflections on having left a Place of Retirement,' 'This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison,' 'Frost at Midnight,' 'Fears in Solitude,' 'The Nightingale,' 'Dejection,' and 'To William Wordsworth' (sometimes printed 'To a Gentleman'). The list is not complete; there are shorter pieces which might be added; but these are the most substantial and, I think, the best. The qualities common to all the eight are qualities of style no less than of subject. Wordsworth is clearly more entitled than Coleridge to be considered the leader in creating and also in expounding a new kind of poetry, though a careless examination of their early works might lead one to think that they came forward simultaneously and independent of each other as reformers. Until he met Wordsworth, which was probably in 1795, Coleridge wrote in the manner which had been fashionable since the death of Milton, employing without hesitation all those poetic licences which constituted what he later termed 'Gaudyverse,' in contempt. Wordsworth, on the other hand, though employing the same devices in his first published poems, 'An Evening Walk' and 'Descriptive Sketches,' showed, here and there even in those juvenile compositions, a naturalness which foretold the revolt accomplished in 'Guilt and Sorrow,' dating from 1794. If one reads Coleridge's early poems in chronological order, one will perceive that Gaudyverse persists till about the middle of 1795, and then quickly yields to the natural style which Wordsworth was practising.

'The Eolian Harp,' composed on Aug. 20, 1795, in the short period when Coleridge was happy in his approaching marriage, sounds many a note of the *dolce stil nuovo*, and is moreover in substance his first important and at the same time characteristic poem. The influence of Wordsworth, whose early works he had read, is to be seen in small details, such as a bold and faithful reference to the scents 'snatched from

yon beanfield.' The natural happiness of Coleridge, which was to break forth from him in spite of sorrow through all his darkened later years, flows like a sunlit river in this poem. In two magnificent passages he anticipates by nearly three years the grand climax of the 'Lines composed a few miles above Tintern Abbey,' singing:

'O! the one Life within us and abroad,
Which meets all motion and becomes its soul,
A light in sound, a sound-like power in light,
Rhythm in all thought, and joyance everywhere—

And what if all of animated nature
Be but organic Harps diversely framed,
That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps,
Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,
At once the Soul of each, and God of all.'

Here is the Philosopher at his best, but he steps down from the intellectual throne at the bidding of love; and out of consideration for Sarah's religious scruples, and in obedience to his own deep humility, apologizes for

'These shapings of the unregenerate mind.'

It is to be noted also that the blank verse is more fluent and easy than Milton's, or any that had been written since Milton, moving with a gentle yet sufficiently strong rhythm, and almost free from the suggestion of the heroic couplet, a suggestion which is *felt* in nearly all 18th-century unrhymed verse, as of something recently lost and not quite forgotten. The cadences are long and beautiful, binding line to line and sentence to sentence in a way that the constant use of couplets and stanzas had made rare since Milton's time.

A few weeks later Coleridge wrote 'Reflections on having left a Place of Retirement.' The poem begins with a quiet description of the surrounding scene and, after a superb flight of imagination, brings the mind back to the starting-point, a pleasing device which we may call the 'return.' The imagination, in the second poem, seeks not, as in the first, a metaphysical, but an ethical height. The poet is tormented in the midst of his happiness by the thought of those who live in wretchedness or who die in the war, and asks himself:

'Was it right
While my unnumbered brethren toiled and bled,

COLERIDGE'S CONVERSATION POEMS

That I should dream away the entrusted hours
On rose-leaf beds, pampering the coward heart
With feelings all too delicate for use?

The problem is not stated in abstract, but in concrete terms. In fact, the only abstract passages in the Conversation Poems are the two quoted above, from 'The Eolian Harp'; and in general it is noticeable that Coleridge, whose talk was misty and whose prose writings are often like a cloud, luminous but impossible to see through, is one of the simplest and most familiar of poets. He, the subtlest metaphysician in England, was, as a poet, content to express elementary and universal feelings in the plainest terms.

On July 2, 1797, Coleridge, with Dorothy Wordsworth sitting beside him, drove from Racedown in Dorset to Nether Stowey in Somerset, and for about two weeks the small cottage behind Tom Poole's hospitable mansion sheltered William and Dorothy and perhaps Basil Montague's little boy, whom they were educating, besides Coleridge and Mrs. Coleridge and Hartley the baby and Nanny their maid. To fill up the measure, Charles Lamb joined them on the 7th and stayed a week. Coleridge, writing to Southey, says:

'The second day after Wordsworth came to me, dear Sara accidentally emptied a skillet of boiling milk on my foot, which confined me during the whole time of C. Lamb's stay, and still prevents me from all walks longer than a furlong. While Wordsworth, his sister, and Charles Lamb were out one evening, sitting in the arbour of T. Poole's garden, which communicates with mine, I composed these lines, with which I am pleased.'

He encloses the poem 'This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison,' in which he refers tenderly to his guests as 'my Sister and my Friends.' It begins:

'Well, they are gone, and here I must remain,
This lime-tree bower my prison! I have lost
Beauties and feelings such as would have been
Most sweet to my remembrance even when age
Had dimmed mine eyes to blindness!'

In imagination he follows them as they 'wander in gladness along the hill-top edge,' and thinks with special satisfaction of the pleasure granted to his gentle-hearted Charles, who had been long 'in the great City pent,' an expression which he uses again in 'Frost at Midnight' and

which Wordsworth later adopted, both of them echoing a line of Milton. The idea of storing up happy memories for some wintry season of the heart, an idea expanded by Wordsworth in 'Tintern Abbey,' and again in 'I wandered lonely as a Cloud,' occurs in the lines quoted above; and Wordsworth's famous brave remark,

'Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her,'

is also anticipated in this poem when Coleridge declares,

'Henceforth I shall know
That Nature ne'er deserts the wise and pure,'

the wise and pure, we may be certain, being in their eyes those who love Nature. In this third Conversation Poem Coleridge has risen above the level attained in the former two; Gaudyverse is gone entirely, and unaffected simplicity, the perfection of tranquil ease, reigns without a rival. No better example, even in Wordsworth's own verse, could be found to illustrate the theory set forth three years later in the Preface to 'Lyrical Ballads.' The beauty and truth of the poem and the picture it gives of Coleridge's yearning heart of love do not depend upon the fact that it was an illustrious trio whom he followed in imagination as they roved 'upon smooth Quantock's airy ridge'; it is a clear boon to us that they happened to be no less than Charles Lamb and Dorothy and William Wordsworth. The significant thing is Coleridge's unselfish delight in the joys of others. Happiness of this kind is an inexhaustible treasure to which all have access.

'Frost at Midnight,' composed in February, 1798, also dates from that most blessed time, when he was living in concord with his wife, under the wide-branching protection of strong Thomas Poole, with William and Dorothy near and poetry pouring unto him from the heaven's height. It is the musing of a father beside the cradle of his child, and the passage is well known in which he foretells that Hartley shall

'wander like a breeze
By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags
Of ancient mountain.'

The chief beauty of the poem, however, is in its 'return,' which is the best example of the peculiar kind of blank verse Coleridge had evolved,

as natural-seeming as prose, but as exquisitely artistic as the most complicated sonnet:

‘Therefore all seasons shall be sweet to thee,
Whether the summer clothe the general earth
With greenness, or the redbreast sit and sing
Betwixt the tufts of snow on the bare branch
Of mossy apple-tree, while the nigh thatch
Smokes in the sun-thaw; whether the eave-drops fall
Heard only in the trances of the blast,
Or if the secret ministry of frost
Shall hang them up in silent icicles,
Quietly shining to the quiet Moon.’

‘Fears in Solitude,’ written in April 1798, ‘during the alarm of an invasion,’ is the longest of the Conversation Poems. It begins characteristically in a low key, with a quiet description of the poet’s surroundings. He is reposing, happy and tranquil, in a green dell, above which sings a skylark in the clouds. Then quite suddenly his conscience cries out, when he thinks, as in ‘Reflections on having left a Place of Retirement,’ of the dangers and sufferings of others. From self-tormenting he passes into an indictment of his countrymen for going lightly to war and for having ‘borne to distant tribes’ slavery, suffering, and vice. In words of terrible sincerity he charges society and his age with hardness and frivolity. ‘We have loved,’ he cries, ‘to swell the war-whoop, passionate for war.’ To read of war has become ‘the best amusement for our morning meal.’ We have turned the forms of holy religion into blasphemy, until

‘the owlet Atheism,
Sailing on obscene wings athwart the noon,
Drops his blue-fringed lids, and holds them close,
And hooting at the glorious sun in Heaven,
Cries out “Where is it?”’

Down to the 129th line the strain of passionate pacificism continues. It is the confession of a tender-hearted, conscience-stricken man, to whom has been revealed a region above partisan and national views. We feel that if the passage had been declaimed to an army before battle, the men would have broken ranks in horror of their own designs. Quite unexpectedly, however, the tone changes at this point, and he bursts into a tirade against the French, calling upon Englishmen to stand

forth and 'repel an impious foe.' The violence of the transition is disconcerting. But anon, with a thrust in each direction, at the over-sanguine English friends of the Revolution and at its unreasonable foes, he sings a glorious pæan to 'dear Britain,' his 'native Isle.' Then comes a sweet 'return': he bids farewell to the soft and silent spot where he has been reclining; he thinks with joy of his beloved Stowey and his friend Poole and the lowly cottage where his babe and his babe's mother dwell in peace. It was like Coleridge to see both sides of the problem raised by the war, by all war, and to express both with equal poignancy. Extreme as are the limits to which his imagination carries him, his eloquence is vitiated by no sentimentalism or self-delusion. The dilemma is fairly stated; the distress is genuine. Were it not for the exquisite frame in which the fears and questionings are set, were it not for the sweet opening and the refreshing 'return,' the pain excited by this poem would outweigh our pleasure in the aptness of its figures and the melody of its verse. But the frame saves the picture, as the profound psychological truth of the picture justifies the beauty of the frame. Coleridge was unaware how successful he had been, for in a note in one of his manuscript copies of this superb work of art he says: 'The above is perhaps not Poetry, but rather a sort of middle thing between Poetry and Oratory, *sermoni propria*. Some parts are, I am conscious, too tame even for animated prose.' These words must have been dictated by humility rather than by critical judgment. He would have made no such deduction had Wordsworth or Lamb written the verses.

In the same productive month, April 1798, he wrote 'The Nightingale,' which he himself terms a Conversation Poem, though it is neither more nor less conversational than the others of this kind. It was printed five months later in 'Lyrical Ballads.' Hazlitt, in his account of a visit he made that spring to Nether Stowey, tells of a walk he took with William and Dorothy and Coleridge: 'Returning that same evening, I got into a metaphysical argument with Wordsworth, while Coleridge was explaining the different notes of the nightingale to his sister, in which we neither of us succeeded in making ourselves perfectly clear and intelligible.' In Dorothy's Alfoxden journal are brief mentions of many a walk by moon or star light with 'dear Col.' The friendship had ripened fast. 'My Friend, and thou, our Sister' are addressed in the poem, and we may be sure the nightingales themselves sang nothing half so sweet to Dorothy's ears as the liquid lines of the music-master. Many little incidents of their walks would crowd her memory in later years as she read them. The 'castle huge' mentioned in the poem is a romantic

exaggeration for Alfoxden house, and she is the 'gentle maid' who dwelt hard by. "Thus Coleridge dreamed of me," might she sigh in her old age, when he had passed into the eternity of his fame and she was lingering by shallower streams of life, *assise auprès du feu, devisant et filant*.

Thus far we have seen Coleridge in his day of strength. If he has written of sorrow, it has been sorrow for suffering mankind; if he has written of sin, it has been the sin of his country. He has been too manly to invent reasons for self-pity. But he is wretched without the companionship of loving friends. In Germany, when separated from the Wordsworths, he sends a wistful call across the frozen wastes of the Lüneburg Heath:

'William, my head and my heart, dear William and dear
Dorothea!
You have all in each other; but I am lonely and want you!'

And when he ran away from them in Scotland, perhaps to escape their anxious care of his health, he was soon in distress and crying out:

'To be beloved is all I need,
And whom I love I love indeed.'

Prior to his return from Germany, in the summer of 1799, he had not become a slave to opium, though the habit of taking it had been formed. In the next three years the vice grew fixed, his will decayed, he produced less, and fell into depths of remorse. From Dorothy's Grasmere journal it appears unlikely that she or her brother understood the reason for the change which they undoubtedly perceived in him. Love blinded them to the cause, while making them quick to see and lament the effects. She kept a journal for her own eyes alone, and one feels like an intruder when one reads it in print, and sees in it sure signs that she loved with romantic tenderness the visitor who came from time to time over the hills from Keswick, and whose letters she placed in her bosom for safe-keeping, and whose sufferings, as she detected them in his altered countenance, made her weep. The situation was not rendered less delicate by the fact that he was unhappy with his wife; and Dorothy's extraordinary power of self-abnegation must have been strained almost unendurably when she found that the woman for whom Coleridge felt most affection was Sarah Hutchinson. There was something innocent and childlike in all his sympathies and likings and

lovings. He never permanently alienated a friend; he never quite broke the tie between himself and his wife; he could, it seems, love without selfishness and be loved without jealousy. Ernest Hartley Coleridge once told me that he was quite sure the 'Asra' of Coleridge's poems was Sarah Hutchinson, and that the poet loved her. Mr. Gordon Wordsworth has told me the same thing. 'Sara' in the poems before 1799 refers, of course, to Mrs. Coleridge; after that date to Miss Hutchinson. She was his amanuensis and close companion when he lived, as he did for months at a time, with the Wordsworths at Grasmere. Their hospitality knew no bounds where he was concerned, and their patience with him as he bent more and more under the power of narcotics and stimulants was almost inexhaustible.

In the winter of 1801-1802, the two causes of Coleridge's unhappiness, opium and domestic discord, worked havoc with him and brought him to despair. The wings of poesy were broken, as he realized full well. Meanwhile Wordsworth was in high poetic activity, healthy, forward-looking, and happy. On April 4, 1802, when William and Dorothy were on a visit to Keswick, and could judge for themselves of his misery, he composed, in part at least, the poem 'Dejection,' which is a confession of his own failure, and one of the saddest of all human utterances. But it is a glorious thing, too, for as the stricken runner sinks in the race he lifts up his head and cheers the friend who strides onward, and this generosity is itself a triumph. On Oct. 4, Wordsworth's wedding day and the seventh anniversary of Coleridge's marriage, the poem was printed in the 'Morning Post.' It is an ode in form only; in contents it is a conversation. It is not an address to Dejection, but to William Wordsworth. As printed in the newspaper, it purports to be directed to some one named Edmund; in Coleridge's editions of his collected works this name is changed to Lady; but in the three extant early manuscripts the word is sometimes William and sometimes Wordsworth. In this sublime and heartrending poem Coleridge gives expression to an experience of double consciousness. His sense-perceptions are vivid and in part agreeable; his inner state is faint, blurred, and unhappy. He sees, but cannot feel. The power of feeling has been paralysed by chemically induced excitements of his brain. The seeing power, less dependent upon bodily health, stands aloof, individual, critical, and very mournful. By 'seeing' he means perceiving and judging; by 'feeling' he means that which impels to action. He suffers, but the pain is dull, and he wishes it were keen, for so he should awake from lethargy and recover unity at least. But nothing from outside can

restore him. The sources of the soul's life are within. Even from the depth of his humiliation and self-loathing he ventures to rebuke his friend for thinking it can be otherwise; William, with his belief in the divinity of Nature, his confidence that all knowledge comes from sensation, his semi-atheism, as Coleridge had called this philosophy:

'O William! we receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does Nature live.'

Coleridge never faltered in his conviction that spirit was independent of matter. His unhappy experience deepened his faith in the existence of God, and of his own soul as something detachable from his 'body that did him grievous wrong.' Yet he had once been a disciple of David Hartley and had, it seems, made a convert of Wordsworth, whose persistence in a semi-materialistic philosophy now alarmed him. In every other respect he venerates him and humbles himself before him. Wordsworth, pure in heart, that is to say, still a child of Nature, and free, has not lost his birthright of joy, which is the life-breath of poetry. But Oh! groans Coleridge, I have lost my gift of song, for each affliction

'Suspends what Nature gave me at my birth,
My shaping spirit of Imagination.'

His own race prematurely ended, he passes the torch to the survivor:

'Dear William, friend devoutest of my choice,
Thus mayst thou ever, evermore rejoice.'

Another awful day of remorse and humiliating comparison was approaching. In April, 1804, Coleridge left England for Sicily and Malta, where he sank very low in what had now become an incurable disease, though he subsequently at various times made heroic stands against it, through religious hope, the marvellous energy of an originally strong and joyous nature, and the devotion of one friend after another. While he was distant from his staunch supporters, Poole and Wordsworth, his creative powers, through the exercise of which he might have preserved some degree of self-respect, more nearly failed than at any period of his life. He came back to England in August, 1806, so ashamed that for months he avoided his family and his friends. After many anxious efforts the Wordsworths and good Sarah Hutchinson captured him and kept him with them for several days at an inn in Kendal. Following their advice, he agreed upon a more definite separation from Mrs. Coleridge,

to which she, however, would not consent. They had him now within reach, and in January, 1807, he visited them at a farmhouse, on Sir George Beaumont's estate, in which they had been living for several months. Here, one long winter night, Wordsworth began reading to him from the manuscript of 'The Prelude,' that poem dedicated to him, in which the Growth of a Poet's Mind is narrated. What subject could have been more interesting or more painful to him? On the night when Wordsworth's deep voice ceased declaiming the firm pentameters, his brother poet, roused from lethargy, composed in response his lines 'To William Wordsworth.' Lingering in his ear was the graceful tribute which recalled the glory of his youth, so few years past and yet so completely gone:

'Thou in bewitching words, with happy heart,
Didst chaunt the vision of that Ancient Man,
The bright-eyed Mariner, and rueful woes
Didst utter of the Lady Christabel.'

Coleridge's reply, touching for the gratitude, reverence, and humbleness which it expresses, is remarkable too for the lightning flashes in which it shows us the course of Wordsworth's life and of his own, and summarizes 'The Prelude.' There is even, in the phrase about a tranquil sea 'swelling to the moon,' a reminiscence of a remark made by Dorothy one night years before as they walked by the Bristol Channel. How her heart must have jumped when she recognized this touch! The childlike candor of a beautiful spirit shines in the following lines, in which unconquered goodness and imperishable art unite:

'Ah! as I listened with a heart forlorn
The pulses of my being beat anew:
And even as Life returns upon the drowned,
Life's joys rekindling roused a throng of pains—
Keen pangs of Love, awakening as a babe,
Turbulent, with an outcry in the heart;
And fears self-willed, that shunned the eye of Hope;
And Hope that scarce would know itself from Fear;
Sense of past Youth, and Manhood come in vain,
And Genius given, and Knowledge won in vain.'

In the divine economy and equilibrium of the world all things have their uses and every disturbed balance is restored. Genius is *not* given in vain, goodness is never wasted, love comes at last into its own. The

misfortunes, nay, even the faults of Coleridge, which were so grievous to him, can be seen now as a purifying discipline. I do not wish to preach a sermon in defence of weakness; but in all justice, not to say charity, let us ask ourselves whether the frailty of this great and essentially good man did not enhance his virtues and make him more lovable. He had no pride except in the achievements of his friends. He distrusted himself, and his dependence on the love and regard of his friends gave them the joy that women feel in caring for helpless babes. He lost at times the sense of his own personality, and found communion with others, with Nature, and with the Divine Spirit. He hated himself for his sins, and was innocent of envy, presumption, self-deception, pretence. He sank in his own opinion, and humility became his crown of glory. His power of feeling failed from excessive use, and he took keen pleasure in the happiness of others. He suffered burning remorse for wasted gifts and opportunities, but never whined about the futility of life. He trifled with his own sensations, but was no sentimentalist. He wandered, athirst and weak, in sandy places, but saw on the horizon a 'shady city of palm trees,' and pointed the way thither.

Coleridge's Divine Comedy

I SHALL concentrate on *Christabel*, *The Ancient Mariner*, and *Kubla Khan*. Within a narrow range these show an intensity comparable with that of Dante and Shakespeare. As with those, strong human feeling mixes with stern awareness of evil, without artistic confusions. Coleridge's main negation tends to a subjective sin-fear: his use of *fear* is, indeed, the secret of his uncanny power, this being the most forceful medium for riveting poetic attention.

Christabel is one nightmare; so, pretty nearly, is *The Ancient Mariner*; and *Kubla Khan* at one point strikes terror. Coleridge is expert in nightmarish, yet fascinating, experience. The human imagination can curl to rest, as in a warm bed, among horrors that would strike pallor in actual life, perhaps recognizing some unknown release, or kinship: as in Wordsworth, who, however, never shows the nervous *tension* of Coleridge. These three poems, moreover, may be grouped as a little *Divina Commedia* exploring in turn Hell, Purgatory, and Paradise.

Christabel is akin to *Macbeth*. There is darkness (though moon-lit), the owl, the restless mastiff. There is sleep and silence broken by fearsome sounds. The mastiff's howl is touched with deathly horror: 'some say she sees my lady's shroud.' Opposed to the nightmarish are images of religious grace. This first part is strangely feminine: the mastiff is a 'bitch,' the heroine set between Geraldine and the spirit of her own mother as forces of evil and grace respectively. 'Mary Mother' and 'Jesu Maria' find a natural home in the phraseology. Some sort of sexual desecration, some expressly physical horror, is revealed by Geraldine's undressing. She insinuates herself into Christabel's religious, mother-

From *The Starlit Dome* (Methuen and Co., London, 1941), pp. 83-97. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

watched, world; she is mortally afraid of the mother-spirit and addresses her invisible presence with extreme dramatic intensity. As so often a seemingly sexual evil is contrasted with a parental good, yet Geraldine gets her opportunity through Christabel's charity, and when she lies with her is imaged as a mother with a child. Some hideous replacing of a supreme good is being shadowed, with an expression of utter surprise, especially in the conclusion to Part I, that so pure a girl can have contact with so obscene an horror. It is something Christabel cannot confess: she is powerless to tell her father. She is under a spell. The evil is nerve-freezing yet fascinating. There is vivid use of light in the tongue of flame shooting from the dying brands, and before that Geraldine's first appearance in the moonlight is glitteringly pictured. Stealth, silence, and sleep are broken by sudden, fearful, sound. In Part II we get perhaps the most intense and nightmarish use of the recurring serpent-image in our literature: both in Bracy's dream of Christabel as a 'sweet bird' (the usual opposite) with a 'bright green snake' coiled round it and Christabel's tranced hissing later, mesmerized by 'shrunk'n' serpent eyes. The poem expresses fear of some nameless obscenity. Christabel, we gather, has a lover, but he is of slight importance in the poem as we have it, though there is reason to suppose the conflict between him and Geraldine was to have been made dramatically explicit.

Christabel helps our understanding of *The Ancient Mariner*, which describes the irruption into the natural human festivity of a wedding party of the Mariner's story of sin, loneliness, and purgatorial redemption. These somewhat Wordsworthian elements are set against the 'merry din,' the 'loud bassoon.' The wedding guest is agonizedly torn from human, and especially sexual, normality and conviviality.

The story starts with a voyage into 'the land of ice and of fearful sounds.' There is snow and fog. From this the Albatross saves them: it is as 'a Christian soul.' Its snowy whiteness would naturally grip Coleridge: he is fascinated by whiteness. The bird seems to suggest some redeeming Christ-like force in creation that guides humanity from primitive and fearful origins. Anyway, the central crime is the slaying of it and by their wavering thoughts the crew 'make themselves accomplices'; and the dead bird is finally hung round the Mariner's neck 'instead of the cross' as a sign of guilt. Indeed, the slaying of the Albatross in the Mariner's story may correspond to the death of Christ in racial history. It is, moreover, an act of unmotivated and wanton, semi-sadistic, destruction, explicitly called 'hellish.' As a result the ship is calmed in a tropic sea. Parching heat replaces icy cold. The 'land of ice

and snow' may be allowed to suggest primeval racial sufferings or primitive layers in the psychology of man; and yet also, perhaps, something more distant still, realms of ultimate and mysterious being beyond nature as we know it, and of a supreme, if inhuman, purity and beauty. The central crime corresponds to the fall, a thwarting of some guiding purpose by murderous self-will, or to loss of innocence in the maturing personality, and the consequent suffering under heat to man's present mental state. In poetic language you may say that whereas water parallels 'instinct' (with here a further reach in 'ice and snow' suggesting original mysteries of the distant and primeval), flames, fire, and light hold a more intellectual suggestion: they are instinct becoming self-conscious, leading to many agonies and high aspirations. The bird was a nature-force, eating human food, we are told, for the first time: it is that in nature which helps man beyond nature, an aspect of the divine purpose. Having slain it, man is plunged in burning agony. The thirst-impressions recall Eliot's *Waste Land*, which describes a very similar experience. The new mode is knowledge of evil, symbolized in the 'rotting' ocean, the 'slimy things' that crawl on it, the 'death-fires' and 'witches oils' burning by night. It is a lurid, colourful, yet ghastly death-impregnated scene, drawn to express aversion from physical life in dissolution or any reptilian manifestation; and, by suggestion, the sexual as seen from the mentalized consciousness of an alien, salty, and reptilian force. It is a deathly paralysis corresponding, it may be, to a sense of sexually starved existence in the modern world: certainly 'water, water everywhere, nor any drop to drink' fits such a reading.

Next comes the death-ship. 'Nightmare Life-in-Death' wins the Mariner's soul. This conception relates to deathly tonings in literature generally, the *Hamlet* experience, and the metaphorical 'death' of Wordsworth's *Immortality Ode*. It is, significantly, a feminine harlot-like figure, and is neatly put beside Death itself. She 'begins her work' on the Mariner. The other sailors all die: observe how he is to endure *knowledge* of death, with guilt. He is 'alone on a wide wide sea' in the dark night of the soul; so lonely—compare Wordsworth's solitaires—that God Himself seemed absent. The universe is one of 'beautiful' men dead and 'slimy things' alive, as in Shelley's *Alastor*. The 'rotting sea' is now directly associated with the 'rotting dead,' while he remains eternally cursed by the dead men's 'eyes.' At the extremity of despair and therefore self-less feeling, his eyes are suddenly aware of the beauty of the 'water-snakes' as he watches their rich colours and fiery tracks: 'O happy living things.' The exquisite prose accompaniment runs: 'By the light of the moon he

beholdeth God's creatures of the great calm.' A fertilizing 'spring of love' gushes from his 'heart' and he blesses them '*unaware*'—the crucial word is repeated—with unpremeditated recognition and instinctive charity. Immediately the Albatross slips from him and sinks like lead into the sea. An utterly organic and unforced forgiveness of God conditions God's forgiveness of man.

The exact psychological or other conceptual equivalents of poetic symbolism cannot be settled. If they could, there would be no occasion for such symbols, and my use of the term 'sexual' might seem rash to anyone unaware of the general relation of snakes and water to sexual instincts in poetry, as in *Antony and Cleopatra* and Eliot's use of water and sea-life. Christabel's enforced and unhappy silence whilst under Geraldine's serpent spell may be directly related to the water-snakes of *The Ancient Mariner*. She, like the becalmed ship, is helpless; perhaps, in her story too, until a certain frontier, involving spontaneous, but not willed, recognition, is reached. Just as she cannot speak, that is, confess, so the Mariner, when, as it were, saved, spends the rest of his life confessing.

The immediate results of conversion are (i) gentle sleep after feverish and delirious horror, and (ii) refreshing rain after parching heat. These are imaginative equivalents and may be said to touch the concept of *agapé* as opposed to *eros*, and are here logically related to Christian symbols. A sense of purity and freedom replaces horror and sin. Energy is at once released: the wind blows and the dead rise and work, their bodies being used by a 'troop of spirits blest,' who next make music, clustering into a circle, with suggestion of Dante's paradisaical lives. Now the ship starts to move like Eliot's similar ships in *The Waste Land* and *Ash Wednesday*; yet no wind, but rather the 'lonesome spirit from the South-pole,' is causing the motion, and demanding vengeance still. Why? and who is he? Coleridge's prose definition scarcely helps. He works 'nine fathom' deep—in man or creation, at once instinct and accuser, and not quite stilled by conversion. At last he is placated by the Mariner's penance. Next '*angelic* power' drives on the ship. There is more trouble from the dead men's eyes and another release. As the ship draws near home, each body has a burning seraph upright above it. These seraphic forms that twice seem conditioned by dead bodies, yet not, as individuals, precisely the 'souls' of the men concerned, must, I think, be vaguely identified with the concept of human immortality, the extra dimension of their upright stature over the bodies being pictorially cogent.

At home there is the 'kirk,' the woodland 'hermit,' and safety. After such fiery experience the normality of the hermit's life, its homely and earthy quality, is emphasized. We meet his 'cushion' of 'moss' and 'oak-stump' and his daily prayers. He is a figure of unstriving peace such as Wordsworth sought, associated with earth and solid fact after nightmare and transcendent vision. Extreme sensual and spiritual adventure has brought only agony. Therefore:

O sweeter than the marriage-feast,
'Tis sweeter far to me,
To walk together to the kirk
With a goodly company.

It is an embracing of *agapé* with a definitely lower place, if not a rejection, accorded to *eros*; a welcoming of earth and refreshing rain ('the gentle rain from heaven' is an *agapé*-phrase in Shakespeare) with a rejection of the sun in its drawing, tormenting, heat. I doubt if there is any relieving synthesis implicit in the 'youths and maidens' that go to church at the end of the poem with the Wordsworthian 'old men and babes': the balance is scarcely in favour of youthful assertion. The final lesson is a total acceptance of God and his universe through humility, with general love to man and beast. But the specifically sexual is left unplaced: the wedding-guest is sadder and wiser henceforth, and presumably avoids all festive gatherings from now on; though forgiveness of *reptilian* manifestation remains basic.

This is Coleridge's *Purgatorio*, as *Christabel* is a fragmentary attempt at a little *Inferno*. Whether we can call the central criminal act 'sexual' is arguable: it certainly resembles that in Wordsworth's *Hart-leap Well*, but the Mariner's compulsion to tell his tale suggests rather Eliot's Sweeney and his grim account. One might notice that the imaginative tonings in *Lucrece* and *Macbeth* are identical, and that 'sadism' may be only a conscious recognition of a deeper relation than has yet been plumbed: motiveless cruelty is, moreover, a general and most valuable poetic theme, as in Heathcliff's ill-treatment of a dog. Such thoughts help to integrate into the whole the mystery of an unmotivated action which, with the South-pole spirit itself, is left rationally undefined, as Shakespeare leaves the motives of *Macbeth* and *Iago* and the pain of *Hamlet* rationally undefined. The new life comes from acceptance of the watery and the reptilian, at which the sea no longer appears to be 'rotting,' that is, dead, though all these drop out of the picture after-

wards. The crime, together with rejection of the unrefreshing 'rotting sea' and its creatures, brings parched agony, but acceptance of those brings the other, heavenly and refreshing, water of rain. Also acceptance precedes repentance, not vice versa. A spontaneous, unsought, upspring of love alone conditions the down-flow of grace.

The poem is lively and colourful, as A. C. Bradley has well emphasized. The movement and appearance of sun and moon are described in stanza after stanza; and stars too. The sun peeps in and out as though uncertain whether or not to give its blessing on the strange scene. The poem glitters: the Mariner holds the Wedding Guest with a 'glittering eye,' which, if remembered with his 'skinny hand,' preserves a neat balance. The light is somewhat ghastly: as in the strange sheen of it on ice or tropic calm, and the witches' oils burning 'green and blue and white.' Green light is a favourite in Coleridge (cp. in *Dejection* 'that green light that lingers in the west'). The snakes move in 'tracks of shining white,' making 'elfish' illumination. Their colours are 'blue, glossy-green and velvet black' and by night their every motion pencils 'a flash of golden fire.' The ghost-ship comes barred across the blood-red sun. The 'charmed water' is said to burn 'a still and awful red.' There is a very subtle interplay of light and colour. The Life-in-Death figure is a garish whore with red lips, yellow hair, white leprosy skin; the evil creatures are colourful; the supernatural seraphs brilliant. The whole is dominated by a fearful intensity summed in the image, rather dark for this poem, of a night-walker aware of a demon following his steps. But the play of light and colour helps to give the somewhat stringy stanza succession and thinly narrative, undramatic sequence of events a certain intangible poetic mass. I doubt if the rhyme-links, the metrical rhythms, even the phrase-life, so to speak, would be considered fine poetry without this and, what is equally important, the substance of idea and meaning we have been analysing.

The strangeness and ghastly yet fascinating lights of the experience must guide our judgement of the solution. The experience is of fearful fascination; a feverish horror that is half a positive delight, mental pre-eminently; and the return is a return to earth, the hermits' cell and mossy stone, a return to reality and sanity. Whatever our views of the implied doctrine there is no artistic confusion or lack of honesty. The balancing of symbols, as in the contrast of bird-life and the reptilian, is subtle as Dante's (the *Purgatorio* has a very similarly reiterated observation of the sun in varied position and mood) and Shakespeare's, though

without the massive scheme of the one or the sympathetic range of the other. It is a little poem greatly conceived. The supernatural figures dicing for the Mariner's soul suggest, inexactly, the balancing of the Eumenides against Apollo in respect of Orestes in Aeschylus; while the 'lonesome spirit' from the South Pole in its office of accuser performs exactly the function of those Eumenides, furies of guilt and accusation. It is replaced eventually by swift angelic power, as in Eliot's *Family Reunion* the furies of *Sweeney Agonistes* turn into angels.

Poetry of any worth is a rounded solidity which drops shadows only on the flat surfaces of philosophical statement. Concretely it bodies forth symbols of which our ghostly concepts of 'life,' 'death,' 'time,' 'eternity,' 'immortality' are only very pallid analogies. They are none the less necessary, if we are to enchain our normal thinking to the creations of great literature, and I next translate the domed symbolism of *Kubla Khan* into such shadow-terms corresponding to the original in somewhat the same way as the science of Christian theology corresponds, or should correspond, to the New Testament.

The pleasure-dome dominates. But its setting is carefully described and very important. There is a 'sacred' river that runs into 'caverns measureless to man' and a 'sunless sea.' That is, the river runs into an infinity of death. The marked-out area through which it flows is, however, one of teeming nature: gardens, rills, 'incense-bearing' trees, ancient forests. This is not unlike Dante's earthly paradise. The river is 'sacred.' Clearly a sacred river which runs through nature towards death will in some sense correspond to life. I take the river to be, as so often in Wordsworth (whose *Immortality Ode* is also throughout suggested), a symbol of life.

Born on a *height*, it descends from a 'deep romantic chasm,' a place 'savage,' 'holy,' and 'enchanted,' associated with both a 'waning moon' and a 'woman wailing for her demon lover.' The river's origin blends romantic, sacred, and satanic suggestions. Whatever our views on sex it would be idle to suppose them anything but a tangle of inconsistencies. Moreover, the idea of original sin, the 'old serpent,' and its relation to sex is not only Biblical but occurs in myth and poetry ancient and modern. We have not yet compassed the straightforward sanity on this vital issue which D. H. Lawrence said would, if attained, make both nasty sex stories and romantic idealisms alike unnecessary: a certain obscene and savage sex-desecration seems to have fixed itself as a disease in the human mind. That is why we find the virgin-symbol, in both paganism and Christianity, sublimated; especially the virgin mother.

Sex is overlaid with both high romantic and low satanic conceptions, complexities, fears, taboos, and worship of all sorts, but the necessity and goodness of pure creativeness no one questions. Our lines here hint a mystery, not altogether unlike Wordsworth's dark grandeurs, blending satanism with sanctity and romance with savagery. They express that mystic glamour of sex that conditions human creation and something of its pagan evil magic; and touch the enigma of the creator-god beyond good and evil, responsible for eagle and boa-constrictor alike.

Whatever our minds make of them, sex-forces have their way. Nature goes on cheerily blasting families and uniting true lovers in matrimonial bonds of 'perdurable toughness,' with an equal efficiency working through rake and curate alike, and not caring for details so long as her work be done. Goethe's poetry well presents this seething, torrential, over-mastering creative energy. Look now at our next lines: at the 'ceaseless turmoil,' the earth-mother breathing in 'fast thick pants,' the fountain 'forced' out with 'half intermitted burst,' the fragments rebounding like hail, the 'chaffy grain beneath the flail,' the 'dancing rocks.' What riotous impression of agony, tumult, and power: the dynamic enginery of birth and creation.

Then off the river goes 'meandering in a mazy motion': observe the rhythm of this line. The maze is, of course, a well-known figure suggesting uncertain and blind progress and is sometimes expressly used for the spiritual complexities of human life; and the general symbolism of mazes and caves throughout my present study might be compared with my brother's inspection of such symbolisms in the ancient world (*Cumaeae Gates*, by W. F. Jackson Knight). After five miles of mazy progress the river reaches the 'caverns measureless to man,' that is, infinity, nothingness; and sinks, with first more tumult (i.e. death-agony), to a 'lifeless ocean,' that is to eternal nothingness, death, the sea into which Timon's story closes. This tumult is aptly associated with war: the principle of those conflicting and destructive forces that drive man to his end. The 'ancestral voices' suggest that dark compulsion that binds the race to its habitual conflicts and is related by some psychologists to unconscious ancestor-worship, to parental and pre-parental authority. We find an interesting analogy in Byron's *Sardanapalus*.

So in picture-language we have a symbolical pattern not unlike Addison's *Vision of Mirza*, though less stiffly allegorical. As for Kubla Khan himself, if we bring him within our scheme, he becomes God: or at least one of those 'huge and mighty forms,' or other similar intuitions of gigantic mountainous power, in Wordsworth. Or we can, provisionally

—not finally, as I shall show—leave him out, saying that the poet's genius, starting to describe an oriental monarch's architectural exploits, finds itself automatically creating a symbolic and universal panorama of existence. This is a usual process, since the poet continually starts with an ordinary tale but universalizes as he proceeds: compare the two levels of meaning in *The Tempest*, where Prospero performs a somewhat similarly superhuman role to Kubla Khan here; or Yeats's emperor in *Byzantium*.

In *The Christian Renaissance* I wrote at length on the concept of immortality as it emerges from interpretation of poetry. I concluded that, though we must normally think in temporal terms and imagine immortality as a state after death, yet poetry, in moments of high optimistic vision, reveals something more closely entwined than that with the natural order. It expresses rather a new and more concrete perception of life here and now, unveiling a new *dimension* of existence. Thus immortality becomes not a prolongation of the time-sequence, but rather that whole sequence from birth to death lifted up vertically to generate a super-temporal area, or solidity. I used such a scheme to explain parts of the New Testament, Shakespeare, Goethe, and other poets: especially here I would point to my interpretation of Wordsworth's *Immortality Ode*. But I did not use *Kubla Khan*, my scheme being evolved from inspection of other poets.

I come now to the latter movement of our poem, whose form is not unlike an expansion of the Petrarchan Sonnet. This is the sestet. Observe that the metre changes: a lilting happy motion, a shimmering dance motion, replaces heavy resonance and reverberation. Our minds are tuned to a new apprehension, something at once assured, happy, and musical. A higher state of consciousness is suggested: and see what it shows us.

The dome's *shadow* falls half-way along the river, which is, we remember, the birth-death time-stream. This shadow—a Wordsworthian impression—is cast by a higher, more dimensional reality such as I have deduced from other poets to be the pictured quality of immortality. It is directly associated with the 'mingled measure' of the sounds coming from the two extremes. In Wordsworth, and elsewhere, immortality may be associated closely with birth, though that is by way of a provisional and preliminary approach to the greater truth; while in our own thinking it is found most often to function in terms of a life after death. But both are finally unsatisfying; birth and death are both mysteries that time-thinking distorts, and personal life beyond their limits a somewhat

tenuous concept. The true immortality is extra-dimensional to all this: it is the *pleasure-dome itself*, arching solid and firm above creation's mazy progress and the 'mingled' sounds of its conflicts, just as in Wordsworth the child's immortality is said to 'brood' over it 'like the day': that is, arching, expansive, immovable.

The 'mingled-measure' suggests the blend and marriage of fundamental oppositions: life and death, or creation and destruction. These 'mingle' under the shadow of the greater harmony, the crowning dome-circle. Observe that it is a paradoxical thing, a 'miracle of rare device'; 'sunny,' but with 'caves of ice,' which points the resolution of antinomies in the new dimension, especially those of light and heat, for Eros-fires of the mind; and ice, for the coldness of inorganic nature, ultimate being, and death, the ice-caves being perhaps related to our earlier caverns, only more optimistically toned; light instead of gloomy, just as 'sunny' suggests no torturing heat. The 'caves of ice' may also hint cool cavernous depths in the unconscious mind (a usual Wordsworthian cave-association) blending with a *lighted* intelligence: whereby at last coldness becomes kind. These, ice and sun-fire, are the two elemental antitheses of *The Ancient Mariner*, and their mingling may lead us farther. We are at what might be called a marriage-point in life's progress half-way between birth and death: and even birth and death are themselves here mingled or married. We may imagine a sexual union between life, the masculine, and death, the feminine. Then our 'romantic chasm' and 'cedarn cover,' the savage and enchanted yet holy place with its 'half intermitted burst' may be, in spite of our former reading, vaguely related to the functioning of a man's creative organs and their physical setting and, too, to all principles of manly and adventurous action; while the caverns that engulf the sacred river will be correspondingly feminine with a dark passivity and infinite peace. The pleasure-dome we may fancy as the pleasure of a sexual union in which birth and death are the great contesting partners, with human existence as the life-stream, the blood-stream, of a mighty coition. The poet glimpses that for which no direct words exist: the sparkling dome of some vast intelligence enjoying that union of opposites which to man appears conflict unceasing and mazed wandering pain between mystery and mystery.

I would leave a space after 'caves of ice.' I am not now so sure about the sonnet form: those six lines are central. So next we have our third and final movement, starting with the Abyssinian damsel seen in a vision playing music. The aptness of a girl-image here is obvious. In

Shakespeare and Milton music suggests that consciousness which blends rational antinomies, and so our poet equates the once-experienced mystic and girl-born music with his dome. Could he revive in himself that music he would build the spiritual dome 'in air'; that is, I think, in words, in poetry. Or, maybe, he would become himself the domed consciousness of a cold, happy, brilliance, an ice-flashing, sun-smitten, wisdom. The analogy between music and some form of architecture is not solitary: it receives a fine expression in Browning's *Abt Vogler*, a valuable commentary on *Kubla Khan*. The analogy is natural enough for either music or poetry: we talk of architectonics in criticizing poetry or a novel, for the very reason that literary or musical art bears to rational thought the relation of a solid, or at least an area, to a line. Tennyson's *Palace of Art* is a direct analogy, and Wordsworth compares his life's work to a 'Gothic Church.'

The poem's movement now grows ecstatic and swift. There is a hint of a new speed in the drawn-out rhythm of 'To such a deep delight 'twould win me. . . .' Now the three rhymed lines gather up the poet's message together with his consciousness of its supreme meaning with a breathless expectancy toward crescendo. Next follows a fall to a ritualistic solemnity, a Nunc Dimittis, phrased in long vowels and stately measured motion, imaged in the 'circle' and the eyes dropped in 'holy dread' before the prophet who has seen and re-created 'Paradise': not the earthly, but the heavenly paradise; the 'stately' permanence above motion, the pleasure-dome enclosing and transcending human agony and frustration. To tune our understanding we might go to such a passage as Wordsworth's:

incumbencies more awful, visitings
Of the Upholder of the tranquil soul,
That tolerates the indignities of Time,
And, from the centre of Eternity
All finite motions overruling, lives
In glory immutable. (The Prelude, III. 116)

Which transmits a similar recognition.

Kubla Khan is a comprehensive creation, including and transcending not only the dualisms of *The Ancient Mariner* ('sun,' 'ice,' and sexual suggestions recurring with changed significance) but also the more naturalistic, Wordsworthian, grandeurs. Though outwardly concentrating on an architectural synthesis, there is the other, mountainous, elevation suggested in Mount Abora; and indeed the dome itself is a

kind of mountain with 'caves,' the transcendent and the natural being blended, as so often in Wordsworth. It must be related to other similar statements of an ultimate intuition where the circular or architectural supervenes on the natural: in particular to the mystic dome of Yeats's *Byzantium*. The blend here of a circular symbolism with a human figure (the Abyssinian maid) and images of human conflict may be compared both to Dante's final vision and an important passage in Shelley's *Prometheus*. *Kubla Khan* is classed usually with *Christabel* and *The Ancient Mariner*, both profound poems with universal implications. The one presents a nightmare vision related to some obscene but nameless sex-horror; the other symbolizes a clear pilgrim's progress (we may remember Coleridge's admiration of Bunyan's work) through sin to redemption. It would be strange if *Kubla Khan*, incorporating together the dark satanism and the water-purgatory of those, did not, like its sister poems, hold a comparable, or greater, profundity, its images clearly belonging to the same order of poetic reasoning. Its very names are so lettered as to suggest first and last things: Xanadu, Kubla Khan, Alph, Abyssinian, Abora. 'A' is emphatic; Xanadu, which starts the poem, is enclosed in letters that might well be called eschatological; while Kubla Khan himself sits alphabetically central with his alliterating 'k's. Wordsworth's line 'of first, and last, and midst, and without end,' occurring in a mountain-passage (*The Prelude*, vi. 640) of somewhat similar scope, may be compared. The poem's supposed method of composition is well known. How it comes to form so compact and satisfying a unit raises questions outside the scheme of my study. The poem, anyway, needs no defence. It has a barbaric and oriental magnificence that asserts itself with a happy power and authenticity too often absent from visionary poems set within the Christian tradition.

The Ancient Mariner

THE OPENING of the Prefatory Note to 'The Wanderings of Cain' describes how that curious prose fragment came into being, and it ends by saying that the whole scheme for the collaboration with Wordsworth in a poem about Cain 'broke up in a laugh: and the Ancient Mariner was written instead.' This is only one among a number of partial records left by Coleridge himself, or by the Wordsworths, of the origin of the 'Mariner.' These different records piece together into a quite intelligible and consistent account, too familiar to repeat.¹ But 'The Wanderings of Cain' has a special place in that account because it shows how the subject of terrible guilt, suffering, expiation and wandering was already in Coleridge's mind before the various hints which were to form the outline of the Mariner's story came together. Cain's 'countenance told in a strange and terrible language of agonies that had been, and were, and were still to continue to be.' These agonies were related to a landscape in tune with them:

The scene around was desolate; as far as the eye could reach it was desolate: the bare rocks faced each other, and left a long and wide interval of thin white sand.²

It is even verbally but a few steps to 'the wide, wide sea.'

In another draft fragment of the Cain poem³ a rather obscure and evasive sentence says that God inflicted punishment on Cain 'because

From *Coleridge: The Clark Lectures 1951-52* (Rupert Hart-Davis, London, 1953), pp. 84-113. Reprinted by permission of Mrs. Humphrey House.

he neglected to make a proper use of his senses, etc.' Later in this draft come alligators and tigers in close conjunction, just as they occurred together in a speech of the Wandering Jew in Lewis's *The Monk*, which Coleridge reviewed in *The Critical Review* for February 1797.⁴ The Mariner bears traces of both these two traditional figures, Cain and the Wandering Jew.⁵

Not only once, but twice, Coleridge and Wordsworth began to collaborate in an exceedingly light-hearted way in works which dealt with crime, guilt, expiation and wandering. If we are broadly able to trust Coleridge's account, 'The Wanderings of Cain' was begun as a composition-race: and there is no reason at all to doubt that 'The Ancient Mariner' was begun by them jointly to raise £5 to pay the expenses of a walking-tour. It was thus an entirely unexpected by-product of Coleridge's main poetical plans. Those plans were of Miltonic size and seriousness. There is evidence, as Professor R. C. Bald has shown,⁶ for believing that he was deliberately reading with the idea of writing two main works, a series of Hymns to the Sun, Moon and Elements, and an Epic on the Origin of Evil. It is hardly necessary even to say how much matter in the 'Mariner' overlaps with what might have gone into those two works.

We may even suggest that the accident, so to speak, of beginning the 'Mariner' on that November evening in 1797 released Coleridge from some of the burden of his Miltonic responsibilities and helped to split his ambitious synthesising aim of bringing all human knowledge together in the frame of one or more huge poems. I have already tried to show how, in the more ambitious poems just before this period, he was attempting, without much success, to synthesise politics, religion and philosophy in a highly Miltonic style. Now the aims and material split. It has been observed by Dr. Tillyard how very unpolitical 'The Ancient Mariner' is. 'Frost at Midnight' (dated February 1798—that is while the 'Mariner' was still being written) is, if possible, less political still. It is interesting that Coleridge's best political poem, 'France: an Ode,' is also dated February 1798: creative energy used in one direction and style seems also to have released it in other directions and styles. A political Ode in the Gray/Mason tradition, and a blank-verse meditative poem, soaring right away from its origins in Cowper, were written in among work on the 'Mariner,' which differed from both. There could be no clearer disproof of the narrowness of Coleridge's poetic range than the fact that these three poems are contemporary.

Little need be said about the context of styles to which the 'Mariner'

belongs: it has plain affiliations with Gothic horrors, of which Lewis was the fashionable exponent; and it is noticeable too that in the original volume of the *Lyrical Ballads* 'The Ancient Mariner' is the only poem which derives its style from the traditional ballads as they were then available in Percy, rather than from the later ballad of broadsheet.⁷ The precision, success and care, with which Coleridge later cut out many of the cruder traces of these origins—the pseudo-antique spelling, the more glaring archaisms of vocabulary, some of the marvels—is fresh evidence of the justice of his detailed judgement: but yet, when all these changes had been made, it is still remarkable how many features of ballad idiom and method the poem still retains and completely assimilates, diverting and modifying them to its own particular effects. It is partly by these means that the poem manages to escape history and yet retain tradition. Though it will not tie to a table of dates or a map, the 'Mariner' yet uses the keepings of European tradition and all the details of wind and weather which every map implies. Its imagery, both of religion and of the elements, goes deep below the surface of what we may happen to remember or happen to have seen.

But at the same time it uses to the full the vividness of visual description which was one of Coleridge's great poetic strengths. A friend of mine recently said he could not read Coleridge any more—no, not even 'The Ancient Mariner': he could not stand all the supernatural part; but only a few sentences later he went on to say that on a slow sea-voyage to Africa he got up early and walked round the deck reciting the poem to himself, and that nothing could have better fitted his mood or described what he saw than

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
The furrow followed free.⁸

Scarcely any reader, from first acquaintance in childhood, has not felt that the first, most elementary contact with the poem leaves such isolated descriptions fixed in the memory, and it is only a step further, if it is a step at all, to feel, at the next level of relevance, the perfect attunement between the descriptions and the states of the Mariner's mind.

Down dropt the breeze, the sails dropt down,
'Twas sad as sad could be;
And we did speak only to break
The silence of the sea!⁹

None of Coleridge's poems shows more completely developed in practice the principle of description which was quoted earlier from his letter to Sotheby of 1802:

Never to see or describe any interesting appearance in nature without connecting it, by dim analogies, with the moral world proves faintness of impression. Nature has her proper interest, and he will know what it is who believes and feels that everything has a life of its own, and that we are all *One Life*. A poet's heart and intellect should be *combined*, intimately combined and unified with the great appearances of nature and not merely held in solution and loose mixture with them, in the shape of formal similes.¹⁰

The full relevance of this to 'The Ancient Mariner' will begin to appear gradually in what I have to say later. The present relevance is that in the poem the method of relating nature to the moral world is not by 'dim analogies,' nor 'in the shape of formal similes' (there are very few), but by the poet's heart and intellect being intimately *combined* and unified with the great appearances of nature. The method of conjunction is immediate in the natural imagery, and it is only by understanding the imagery that the 'moral world' can be understood. For the present a single simple instance must be enough.

And now there came both mist and snow,
And it grew wondrous cold:
And ice, mast-high, came floating by,
As green as emerald.

And through the drifts the snowy clifts
Did send a dismal sheen:
Nor shapes of men nor beasts we ken—
The ice was all between.

The ice was here, the ice was there,
The ice was all around:
It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
Like noises in a swound!¹¹

In those stanzas it is in the descriptive phrases 'As green as emerald' and 'a dismal sheen' that the double mood of admiration and fear is conveyed: and the double character of this mood is important.

'The great appearances of nature' play an overwhelming part in the poem, and their part was emphasised and further explained in the prose

gloss that was added in 1817. Lowes put this side of the poem epigrammatically by saying that the chief characters in 'The Ancient Mariner' are 'Earth, Air, Fire and Water.'¹² By chief 'characters' we must understand also chief channels of action—for it is through the elements that the Mariner is acted upon.

The function of the elements and heavenly bodies is not merely to *image* the Mariner's spiritual states (though indeed they do this), but also to provide in the narrative structure of the poem the link between the Mariner as ordinary man, and the Mariner as one acquainted with the invisible world, which has its own sets of values.

This link is first suggested in the idea that the Albatross has a power of control over the elements: it is continued in the idea of the plaguing spirit that followed the ship nine fathoms deep from the land of mist and snow. The skeleton ship with the figures of Death and Life-in-Death is linked to the phenomena of the tropical sunset:

The Sun's rim dips; the stars rush out:
At one stride comes the dark;
With far-heard whisper, o'er the sea,
Off shot the spectre bark.¹³

The angelic spirits who inspire the dead men to work the ship are sent to release the ship from the control of the daemons of the elements; and the spirit from the South Pole works under their orders. The two voices in Parts V and VI are two fellow daemons of the Polar Spirit, two 'invisible inhabitants of the element,' as the gloss calls them. And finally the ship is brought back to port under the undisputed control of angelic spirits, but accompanied by a wind.

Across this whole system of daemons of the elements and angelic spirits lies the framework of ordinary Catholic theology—Christ and Mary Queen of Heaven, and in the ending the ordinary Catholic practices of confession, absolution and church-going.

The inter-relation of the different spiritual beings is one of the hardest points in the poem to be clear or confident about; and it is best, approaching the more doubtful through the less, to begin by discussing the poem's more obvious bearings on the 'moral world,' and indeed to establish first that it has a bearing on the moral world at all. For even this has sometimes been disputed. We must start from Coleridge's one main comment on the poem, as it is reported in the *Table Talk* under 31 May 1830:

Mrs. Barbauld once told me that she admired the *Ancient Mariner* very much, but that there were two faults in it,—it was improbable, and had no moral. As for the probability, I owned that that might admit some question; but as to the want of a moral, I told her that in my own judgment the poem had too much; and that the only, or chief fault, if I might say so, was the obtrusion of the moral sentiment so openly on the reader as a principle or cause of action in a work of such pure imagination. It ought to have had no more moral than the *Arabian Nights'* tale of the merchant's sitting down to eat dates by the side of a well, and throwing the shells aside, and lo! a genie starts up, and says he *must* kill the afore-said merchant *because* one of the date shells had, it seems, put out the eye of the genie's son.

The story of the Merchant and the Genie in *The Arabian Nights* is briefly this. A merchant is travelling in a desert with nothing to eat but some biscuits and dates in a wallet. He sits down to eat dates and throws the stones about: a huge and terrible genie appears, with a great scimitar, and says he will cut off the merchant's head. Why? Because one of the stones was flung into the eye of the genie's son and killed him. The merchant pleads that it was quite accidental: but the genie is relentless. Finally the genie allows the merchant one year's respite. He is free to go home to provide for his wife and children, and to order his affairs. This he does, with great justice and generosity and, after a struggle, he returns to the same spot in the desert, as arranged with the genie, exactly one year later. Here he falls in with three old men, mysterious strangers, to whom he tells his story; the genie then appears again. And each of the strangers in turn makes a bargain with the genie that if he can tell the genie a story more marvellous than he has ever heard before, the genie is to remit one-third of the merchant's punishment. The stories cap each other for marvellousness; the genie is honest to the bargain; the merchant goes free and triumphant home, and the three old men go off mysteriously into the desert as they came.

Now this story has not got a 'moral' in the sense that there is a clear explicit detachable maxim which neatly sums up the didactic drift of it. But it seems equally clear that one cannot possibly read the story without being very aware of moral issues in it; aware that its whole development is governed by moral situations, and that without them there wouldn't really be a story. The arbitrariness of the genie; the awful consequences to the merchant of what was originally, on his side, a pure accident; the thoughts of the merchant for his family; these are moral matters. The generosity and exactness with which he arranged his affairs in the year

of respite is developed very fully in the story: and much is made of the struggle about his bargain to return, and of the punctuality and faithfulness with which he kept it. It is very difficult indeed, in reading the story, not to see in his final release, as the result of the three old men's tales, a reward for his honourableness and care in all his dealings. And when one has got so far, it is not difficult to see that—always allowing for the fact that no 'maxim' conveys the *whole* moral of a story—some such maxim as this, deduced from it, is not irrelevant: 'The arbitrary character of fate may be overcome by human honour and goodness; and there may be mysterious powers in the world which aid these virtues.' In the *Arabian Nights* version this moral, or anything like it, is not in Coleridge's words 'obtruded too openly.' But to deny altogether that it (or something like it) is there (when the whole story depends on the genie's arbitrariness, the merchant's honourableness and his final release) would seem to me a grotesque example of wilful blindness.

We do not know how well Coleridge remembered the story or how accurately his nephew reported what he said. But as the *Table Talk* passage stands, it is surely clear that Coleridge never said or meant that the 'Mariner' neither had nor was meant to have a moral bearing or a 'moral sentiment.' He said the fault was '*the obtrusion of the moral sentiment so openly . . . in a work of such pure imagination.*' And this seems to point to his possible dissatisfaction with the summary of the 'moral' as a kind of didactic epigram towards the end:

He prayeth well, who loveth well
Both man and bird and beast.

He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth all.¹⁴

It is obvious that those lines do rub the point home and that they may, when detached from their context, be degraded to the status of a motto in 'almanac art,' or used to express the quite worthy desire to put out crumbs for the dicky-birds on a cold and frosty morning. But coming in context, after the richness and terror of the poem, it is no more a banal moral apothegm, but a moral which has its meaning *because it has been lived*.

All recent full discussions of 'The Ancient Mariner' have taken this for granted. In what follows I owe a great deal to three such discussions,

one by Dr. Tillyard;¹⁵ one by Dr. Bowra;¹⁶ and one by the American writer and critic Mr. Robert Penn Warren.¹⁷ All agree, however much they differ from each other, that the poem has a very serious moral and spiritual bearing on human life: and they are surely right. For Coleridge, talking in 1830, could not possibly have meant to exclude all moral relevance from the working of the 'pure imagination' when his whole developed critical theory stressed again and again the union of heart and head, the special power of the poet to bring 'the whole soul of man into activity.'¹⁸

Coleridge has set us a special problem of critical method. It is obvious that his own creative experience must have deeply affected his critical theories and practice: but he never fully brought the two into relation; he rarely adduced his own poems as instances, and never expounded them. Furthermore, his important critical work was all a good deal later than most of his important creative work. We cannot thus be sure how much of his critical opinion may fairly be carried back into 1797-8 and brought to bear on his own greatest poetry. It is very hard to be fair, and not to pick out what suits us and reject the rest. It is, for instance, tempting to use Coleridge's later distinctions between allegory and symbol in interpreting 'The Ancient Mariner'; but they had not been expressed in 1797-8. In fact, we may be misled if we start the critique of the 'Mariner' and 'Kubla Khan' with this disjunction of allegory from symbol in mind. For all allegory involves symbolism, and in proportion as symbolism becomes developed and coherent it tends towards allegory. This is one of the problems involved in Mr. Warren's exciting essay: he starts as a 'symbolist' criticising all the 'allegorisers' and ends up in something so organised and precise that Coleridge, anyway, would probably have called it an allegorisation. But Mr. Warren would be quite willing to accept that, provided only that his kind of allegory is seen to be distinct from simple 'two-dimensional' allegory.

The poem's very richness at once tempts and defeats definiteness of interpretation; as we commit ourselves to the development of one strand of meaning we find that in the very act of doing so we are excluding something else of importance.

An example of this difficulty occurs on the threshold of interpretation, in the opinion we form about the Mariner's relation to ordinary human beings and the relation of the voyage to ordinary human life. Dr. Tillyard, struck (as everybody must be struck) by the similarities in spirit between the poem and the seventeenth-century voyages—

We were the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea—

as voyages of adventure and discovery, and using, to support his argument, the later Coleridge passage in the *Biographia* about the range of hills which must be crossed by an inquiring spirit, maintains that the Mariner himself is a mental and spiritual adventurer, 'an unusually enquiring spirit,' that he together with the rest of the crew are, from the accepted social point of view, *self-appointed* outcasts and criminals; and that the sea-voyage indicates 'spiritual adventure' which they go out of their way to seek.¹⁹

But how is this present in the poem? The beginning of the Mariner's own account of the voyage contains no hint that he thought of the voyage as a high spiritual enterprise at variance with current limited social ideas, a conscious seeking of adventure. The ship starts off in an atmosphere of communal agreement and pleasure:

The ship was cheered, the harbour cleared,
Merrily did we drop
Below the kirk, below the hill,
Below the lighthouse top.²⁰

The voyage, it seems, began normally, commonly, happily, the crew at one both with the society they left and with each other. In the literature of sea-going the antecedents are rather to be found in such voyages as that described by Herodotus—certainly used by Coleridge when he wrote

The Sun now rose upon the right—²¹

the voyage in which the Phoenician seamen doubled the Cape without knowing that there was a Cape.²² Adventure came upon them unaware.

The Mariner, said Wordsworth in rude complaint, 'does not act, but is continually acted upon.' There is, surely, an important element of truth in this, though it does not in the least derogate from the poem's merits.²³ There are only three points in the poem at which the Mariner may be said to 'act'; these are—the shooting of the Albatross; the blessing of the water-snakes; and the biting of his arm. Each of these actions has a very different character. The shooting of the Albatross comes quite suddenly and unexplained; superficially it is unmotivated and wanton. The Mariner himself never makes any explicit attempt to

explain it: nor does the poem contain, from his point of view, any defence of it. We shall return to this. In the first phase of his recovery, in the crisis at the centre of the poem, when he blesses the water-snakes, he does so *unaware*, and this word 'unaware' is deliberately repeated and occurs each time significantly, emphatically, at the end of the line. That is to say, he did not really know what he was doing; he could find no adequate spring of action in himself, and retrospectively attributed his undeliberate blessing to a supernatural influence on him:

Sure my kind saint took pity on me.²⁴

He himself thought he was more acted upon than acting. Against this must be set the one clear occasion in the poem on which the Mariner does deliberately act. In Part III, when all the crew, including himself, have been stricken dumb by the drought, it is he who sees the sail; it is he who, by a prodigious effort, bites his arm, sucks the blood and finds voice to cry out. This is his one tremendous effort: it is a moment of terrible hope for him and for the whole crew. But the hope is blasted, not just negatively, but positively, appallingly, blasted. The crew all die cursing him with their eyes, and he alone survives.

This is crucial to the whole poem's dramatic effect and, by inference, also to its moral effect. On the one occasion when the Mariner does consciously, deliberately and with all his effort *act*, his action leads ironically to the climax of the disaster. The irony is enforced by the two lines that end this Part:

And every soul, it passed me by,
Like the whizz of my cross-bow!²⁵

The disastrous anticlimax of this action and this hope is made to throw back to the earlier, unexplained act of the shooting. One main element in the poem's theme is that the Mariner's experience involves a tangle of error, incomprehensibility and frustration. He is certainly not a great courageous spiritual adventurer, though he has a great spiritual experience. He started his voyage in unison with the ordinary world in a common set of values: he comes back as half outcast and half participant. In the poem as a whole a deliberate contrast is certainly presented between the background of the wedding and the Mariner's tale. The interruptions of the Wedding-Guest are meant to point this contrast. His constant fear is that the Mariner is a ghost come back from the dead or even himself some kind of infernal spirit. The contrast is not so

much between two types of personality, the normal/conventional and the abnormal/adventurer, but between two aspects of reality, and two potentialities of experience, the visible bodily world of human beings marrying and giving in marriage and an invisible world of spirits and the dead where quite a different system of values is to be learnt. The effect of the interruptions of the Wedding-Guest is to show how these two kinds of reality are always co-existent: the total effect of the poem is to show them interpenetrating. As it has been said, in one aspect the poem is a prothalamium, and there is even the hint that though the wedding-guests who make the 'loud uproar' have got their values wrong, yet the bride and bride-maids singing in the garden-bower are somehow touched by the Mariner's spiritual knowledge: and certainly the guest who has heard the tale cannot join the ordinary merry-making: 'He went like one that hath been stunned.'

The words 'error' and 'incomprehensibility,' used just now of the Mariner's experience, were then a temporary and partial formulation of what must now be developed. The Mariner leaves his killing of the Albatross without any full explanation; he does not, cannot or dare not attempt to give his motives. But the description of the bird, its nature and power, taken with the prose gloss, makes it clear that the killing of it was a ghastly violation of a great sanctity, at least as bad as a murder. The bird's human associations appear in the fact that it was hailed as a Christian soul in God's name, it answered the Mariner's hollo, ate human food, and played with the crew. The gloss calls it 'the pious bird of good omen.'²⁶ Thus it images not only its own obvious place in the natural order, but a system of both human and religious values which is declared to have power over the ship and its crew through its connection with the weather. Furthermore, a function of the bird as a Christian emblem is also hinted at later on, when its corpse is hung round the Mariner's neck 'instead of the cross.'

We have to consider our terminology for talking of an image used in such a complex way. Mr. Warren systematically and boldly uses the terms 'symbol' and 'symbolism,' and develops his theory of a symbol as 'focal, massive, and concrete'; Dr. Bowra also accepts the term 'symbol.' The terminology is not what matters so much as the degree of precision and equation that the use of a terminology allows. Mr. Warren is here somewhat confused: at one point he seems to equate the killing of the bird with the murder of a human being (arguing by a long analogy from Poe), and at another point to say that the killing 'symbolises' the Fall. If these two things are to be held together, it is clear that the symbol

must be functioning not merely towards different objects but in different ways: for the killing cannot *equate* with both a murder and the Fall, which are very different kinds of things. It seems best to avoid the term 'symbol' in order to avoid this risk of incompatible equation. What happens in the poem is that the images gather their bearing by progressively rich associations, by gradual increment, and that exact equation is never fully demanded, even though the associations are ordered and controlled. The killing of the Albatross thus becomes a violation of a great sanctity at the animal, human, and spiritual levels: but these levels are only gradually declared as the poem proceeds, just as the Mariner only gradually discovered the consequences of what he had done. Our enlightenment runs parallel with his.

Any possible link with the Fall is of a different kind from the link with murder; for if such a link is there, it lies in the corruption of the human will by original sin and must be imported into the poem from outside, to explain the Mariner's motive, when he is not able or willing to explain it himself. His sin may or may not be partly the sin of pride and self-assertion against the order of the universe. As the poem stands it is a sin of ignorance, and links to that half-adumbrated sin of Cain, that he 'neglected to make a proper use of his senses etc.' It was a wicked ignorance because accompanied by a wildly thoughtless failure to consider what might be the truth about the order of the universe.

This failure to reach the truth, and, to him, the incomprehensibility of what was going on, is made more apparent when the rest of the crew become accomplices in his crime. They do not know whether the fog and mist (along with the Albatross who brought them) are good or bad, or whether the bird belongs more to them or to the breeze: nor do they know whether the sun is good or bad. This is made fully apparent in that wonderful pair of stanzas in which the thought and verse are in shape identical, but with opposite content:

And I had done a hellish thing,
And it would work 'em woe:
For all averred, I had killed the bird
That made the breeze to blow.
Ah wretch! said they, the bird to slay,
That made the breeze to blow!

Nor dim nor red, like God's own head,
The glorious Sun uprist:
Then all averred, I had killed the bird

That brought the fog and mist.
'Twas right, said they, such birds to slay,
That bring the fog and mist.²⁷

The best approach to clarifying these stanzas (and the poem as a whole) is through the nature of the sun.

In the very next stanza the misunderstanding and incomprehensibility are allied to the wonder at novelty which the poem took over from the sixteenth-century voyages:

We were the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea.

This is one of the places in which the parallel between the physical voyage and the spiritual experience is most perfectly realised. An experience you don't understand produces first a shock of new glorious delight and then turns out to be something else. It is the worst kind of ethical and spiritual mistake—accepting wrong values.

On the naturalistic level this turns on the character of the tropic sun: and much here depends on the syntax.

Nor dim nor red, like God's own head,
The glorious sun uprist:

The syntax of these two lines makes it possible to interpret—

Either (a) That God's head *is* dim and red, but the glorious sun uprose unlike it.

Or (b) That the glorious sun rose like God's head which is *not* dim and red.

Interpretation (b) is made rather more likely, and (a) rather more unlikely, by the comma after 'red,' and this comma is apparently present in all texts. *Lyrical Ballads*, 1800, reads:

Nor dim nor red, like an Angel's head,

with a comma after 'head.'²⁸ There seems no apparent reason, either internally in the poem, or externally, why an angel's head should be dim and red. This temporary variant seems to point to accepting interpretation (b) with the common reading.

The very fact that Coleridge ever changed 'God's own' to 'an Angel's' seems to suggest that what he had in mind was the nimbus, aureole or

'glory' of Christian iconography, and that this is picked up in the word 'glorious.' The rising sun was bright, golden and rayed, quite different from the small, clear-edged, bloody sun which becomes the image of evil two stanzas later. At the naturalistic level, both for the mariners and for Coleridge, the tropic sun changed from being a beautiful, pleasant, 'good' thing to being an unpleasant, evil thing: this change is a natural quality of the tropic sun, irrespective of the eye of the beholder. The naturalistic error of the crew was not to know that the tropic sun has this double character: and this naturalistic error is an image of their moral and spiritual error. This brings clearly to the front a main feature of 'the great appearances of nature' in the poem. It has been remarked for some time that the evil and disaster in the poem occur under the light of the sun, and the different phases of the redemption occur under the light of the moon. And Mr. Warren has developed this 'symbolism of the two lights' further than it had been taken before, by the introduction of his 'secondary' theme which I shall come to in a moment.

In Part II the becalming and the drought all occur under the influence of the sun; it is under the bloody sun that the deep rots, and that the creatures of the deep are slimy things that crawl with legs upon the slimy sea. We have already noticed how the spectre-bark appears in conjunction with the tropical sunset.

Part IV begins with the crisis of extreme isolation, with the frustrated desire for death, and then moves into the first phase of recovery and redemption.

The parallels here again between the spiritual and the natural—the physical imagery not just illuminating but actually conveying the spiritual state—are what most characterise the poem. It is clearest in the landless waste of the sea, the most awful loneliness:

Alone, alone, all, all alone,
 Alone on a wide wide sea!
 And never a saint took pity on
 My soul in agony.²⁹

The transition also from the barren desire for death to the first state of redemption is brought in through the magnificent imagery of the moon and stars. From the helpless repetition of

the sky and the sea, and the sea and the sky³⁰

—the dead, static, unchanging monotony of the spiritual isolation without a specified light—there is a shift by means of the wonderful stanza

The moving Moon went up the sky,
And no where did abide:
Softly she was going up,
And a star or two beside—⁸¹

From death to life, or rather from death-in-life, which is so much worse than death that death is longed-for and unattainable. From death-in-life to life. From the flat, unchanging waste of the sea and the sky and the sky and the sea to the ordered, even movement, with grace and hope, of the moon and stars.

The prose gloss at this point is that one long sentence of astounding beauty:

In his loneliness and fixedness he yearneth towards the journeying Moon, and the stars that still sojourn, yet still move onward; and every where the blue sky belongs to them, and is their appointed rest, and their native country and their own natural homes, which they enter unannounced, as lords that are certainly expected and yet there is a silent joy at their arrival.

The emphasis there seems unmistakable; that the moon and the stars express order and joy. And the word 'joy' was a key word for Coleridge to express the fullest and richest happiness in experience.³²

By this moonlight we see the colouring of the water-snakes, and the blessing of them is by this moonlight:

Beyond the shadow of the ship,
I watched the water-snakes:
They moved in tracks of shining white,
And when they reared, the elfish light
Fell off in hoary flakes.³³

The beams of the moon have just before been said to fall 'Like April hoar-frost spread.' In Dorothy Wordsworth's Journal and again and again in Coleridge's descriptive prose this comparison between moonlight and hoar-frost or 'hoariness' occurs. It was one of their common, agreed comparisons.

The blessing under moonlight is the critical turning-point of the poem. Just as the Albatross was not a mere bird, so these are not mere

water-snakes—they stand for all 'happy living things.' The first phase of redemption, the recovery of love and the recovery of the power of prayer, depends on the Mariner's recognition of his kinship again with other natural creatures: it is an assertion and recognition of the other central principle in the letter to Sotheby:

that everything has a life of its own, and that we are all *One Life*.

And at that point the reminder of the sin against this principle is gone—

The Albatross fell off, and sank
Like lead into the sea.³⁴

At this point we must pause and look back; for we have passed over a difficulty in the imagery of the sun and moon. If the moon is to be associated always with the good and the redemption, why is it that the crew die by the star-dogged moon at the end of Part III? It is difficult to explain this and yet support the idea of a consistently developing imagery in terms of the penance and redemption and reconciliation theme alone; and it is this point, together with others allied to it, that chiefly made me sympathetic to the idea behind Mr. Warren's secondary theme of the 'Imagination.'

The poem up to this point, that is Parts I to IV and the opening stanzas of Part V, taken together with the ending, Part VII, is relatively easy to interpret as a tale of crime, punishment and reconciliation, with the recovery of love in the blessing of the water-snakes as its climax. But the remainder of Part V and the whole of Part VI do not seem at first sight to have quite the same coherence and point. It is here that readers may still find 'unmeaning marvels' and an elaborated supernatural machinery which dissipates concentration. There are wonderful details in the verse, some of the finest descriptions of all; but they may seem to fall apart and to have too little bearing on each other and on the whole. Many published accounts of the poem do not adequately face the implications of the detail in these Parts. It is therefore best to summarize shortly what happens.

The Mariner hears a roaring wind and sees the fires and lightning in the sky. But the ship moves on untouched by the wind, and the re-animated dead men work it: a troop of blessed spirits has entered into them. These spirits make various music. The ship goes on, moved from beneath by the spirit of the South Pole. Through the Two Voices the

Mariner learns that it is this Polar Spirit who requires vengeance for the Albatross's death, and that he will have more penance to do.

Part VI. The Voices say that the ocean is under the power of the moon. The ship is now moved northward by the angelic power while the Mariner is in his trance. He wakes to see the final curse in the eyes of the dead men. Then that spell is snapped, and he feels at last a sweet breeze on himself alone. He arrives at his home port, steeped in moonlight. Then, as the gloss says: 'The angelic spirits leave the dead bodies, And appear in their own forms of light.' This acts as the signal which brings out the boat from land.

In Part VII a dreadful rumbling sound comes under the water and the ship sinks.

A quite normally accepted and simple interpretation of Parts V and VI treats them as a further necessary extension of the expiation theme. In the blessing of the water-snakes the Mariner has reconciled himself to the creatures, but it remains for him to reconcile himself also with the Creator:³⁵ therefore he has to suffer once more (this time from the curse of the dead men's eyes) and to win the power of recognising the beauty of the angelic music.

This is broadly acceptable; but it takes us very little distance in understanding the complicated machinery. Is there any serious import in the answers to such questions as these: What is the function of the Polar Spirit? In one aspect he appears as the friend and avenger of the 'pious bird of good omen,' and yet he is made to work under obedience to the angelic troop, who are thus plainly, in the spiritual hierarchy, superior to him; and he is bought off by the promise that the Mariner's penance shall continue. It might have seemed better to have made the angelic troop themselves the protectors of the Albatross and made them require the further penance. Why should the ship be moved first by the Polar Spirit and then by the angelic power? Again, what is the significance of the two winds in Parts V and VI? Put the problem in another way: are the avenging by the tutelary spirits of the South Sea and the reanimation of the dead bodies to work the ship here just out of politeness, because Wordsworth suggested them?³⁶ The first main problem here is to decide whether there is any meaning in the two different kinds of supernatural being.

The whole discussion of this problem has been clarified and ennobled by Mr. Warren's long essay, which I now wish to summarise. He maintains that the poem has 'two basic themes, both of them very rich and provocative.' The primary theme, which is 'the outcome of the fable

taken at its face value as a story of crime and punishment and reconciliation,' is the 'the theme of sacramental vision, or the theme of the "One Life."' The secondary theme is 'concerned with the context of values in which the fable is presented' and is 'the theme of the imagination.' The two themes are finally fused in the poem.³⁷ He aims to establish the existence of this secondary theme by two lines of argument—first, that there are parts of the poem not otherwise easily intelligible, such as Parts V and VI; and second, that the symbolism of the poem is richer and more coherent than the redemption, visionary, theme alone requires. Mr. Warren elaborates the contrast of the 'two lights' in great detail.

He points out quite rightly and fully (p. 87) the 'pervasive presence of the moon and moonlight in Coleridge's work,' especially in association with creativeness. In 'Sonnet to the Autumnal Moon,' 1788, she is called, the 'Mother of wildly-working visions,'³⁸ and in 'Songs of the Pixies,' 1796, 'Mother of wildly-working dreams.'³⁹ 'Christabel' and 'The Ancient Mariner' are bathed in moonlight: the moon is over the deep romantic chasm of 'Kubla Khan'; it is prominent in 'The Nightingale,' 'Cain' and 'Dejection.'

Mr. Warren maintains that the association is so recurrent and persistent in Coleridge's writing, between creation or the activity of the secondary imagination and the moonlight, half-lights, dim lights, gloom, luminiscent clouds and so on, that the association between them can justifiably be regarded as habitual; and that as it goes back even into his very early poems, it can without injustice be taken as established (even if not consciously) at the time of writing the 'Mariner.' He quotes from the *Biographia* passage in which Coleridge recalled the origin of the *Lyrical Ballads* themselves:

The sudden charm, which accidents of light and shade, which moonlight or sun-set, diffused over a known and familiar landscape, . . . These are the poetry of nature.⁴⁰

The Albatross, besides being associated with human nature on the level of the primary theme, is also associated with the moon, mist, cloud and fog-smoke, on the level of the secondary theme of the imagination:

In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud,
It perched for vespers nine;
Whiles all the night, through fog-smoke white,
Glimmered the white Moon-shine.⁴¹

Furthermore the bird is associated with the breeze, which Mr. Warren takes to be the 'creative' wind, for which there are countless parallels in other poets.

The sun is kept entirely out of the matter. The lighting is always indirect, for even in the day we have only 'mist or cloud,'—the luminous haze, the symbolic equivalent of moonlight. But not only is the moon associated with the bird, but the wind also. Upon the bird's advent a 'good south wind sprung up behind.' And so we have the creative wind, the friendly bird, the moonlight of imagination, all together in one symbolic cluster.⁴²

He thus establishes what he calls a 'symbolic cluster,' including the wind, bird, mist and moon, which belong to the imagination and all the imaginative side of man's activity. And in his shooting, the Mariner not only commits a crime against the other, natural and spiritual, order of the world, but also a crime against creative imagination; and part of the penalty is the loss of the wind.

The dual character of the ice which I have already noted at the first arrival of the ship near the South Pole—the emerald and the dismal sheen—also expresses the dual character of the imagination, that it is partly a blessing and partly a curse to him who lives by it. It is this cursing side of the imagination which accounts for the particular vengeance of the Polar Spirit on the Mariner as distinct from the punishment exacted by the sun. And this dual character and special vengeance also explain why the moon is allowed to be the light by which the crew die. And further, in his capacity of Wanderer, the Mariner is to be thought of as the 'cursed poet' of the later Romantics. By contrast to the moon and mist of the Imagination, the sun and the glaring light are, for Mr. Warren, the light of the Understanding, the mere reflective faculty, which 'partakes of DEATH';⁴³ and just as the Mariner and also the crew failed to see the significance of the bird in the mist, so they also fail to understand the nature of the sun, not only at the naturalistic level, as we have already seen, but also because they are taking the lower faculty of the Understanding as their inadequate guide to life.⁴⁴

Warren's essay must be read complete, with its notes, to see how inadequate is this broad outline of its argument. There are two main questions about it which most urgently need asking: how far does it succeed in giving a coherent and convincing explanation of the miscellaneous detail in the difficult parts of the poem? And in what sense does it establish that there is a theme which is 'the theme of the imagination'?

The answers to both these questions depend upon the view we take of symbols and symbolism.

I suggest that if we accept the term 'symbol' we must allow symbols a freer, wider, less exact reference; and that therefore it is probably wiser to drop the term altogether. Mr. Warren himself fully allows for the possibility (even likelihood) that Coleridge did not *consciously* use symbols at all. This is consistent with Coleridge's recognition of the unconscious element in the workings of genius: but it does not therefore follow that there was a latent precision waiting for critics to elucidate it. Mr. Warren seems in the last resort to be a precisionist more because he wishes to make clear to himself and others some features of the richness he has found in the poem than because he believes that the poem actually works upon its readers by the methods of precision. There is a natural and proper dread of the long-traditional praise of the poem's 'atmosphere,' because that praise has so often accompanied the belief that there is scarcely any content or meaning at all, and that all is thin, vague and 'magical.' But a rich certainty is not the only alternative to a poor uncertainty.

The first of the two questions, that about the miscellaneous detail, can only be answered here by two examples. In dealing with Part V, Warren agrees with Bowra and others that 'in the reanimation of the bodies of the fellow mariners, there is implicit the idea of regeneration and resurrection'; but then he finds himself compelled to write:

But the behaviour of the reinspired bodies, taken in itself, offers a difficulty. Taken at the natural level, the manipulating of the sails and ropes serves no purpose. Taken at the symbolic level, this activity is activity without content, a 'lag' in the poem, a 'meaningless marvel.'⁴⁵

Nor does he later succeed in giving an adequate explanation of the need for this behaviour, even when not 'taken in itself'; for he concentrates more on the angelic troop than on what it makes the bodies do.

At this point Warren's scheme of symbolism does not serve us. But if we look to the total effect of the poem on its readers, there is little doubt that ll. 329-44 add something not adequately expressed elsewhere, especially the stanza:

The body of my brother's son
 Stood by me, knee to knee:
 The body and I pulled at one rope,
 But he said nought to me.

This brings home, as nothing else does, the horror of the deaths, the violation of family ties which the action has involved; it dramatises to the Mariner's consciousness the utter ruin of the merry, unified community which had set out on the voyage. The curse in the stony eyes (ll. 436-41) is made far more appalling by this specially intimate experience of the fact that intimacy was gone for ever. And this is achieved at a point where the 'system' of the poem is decidedly weak.

The second point of detail is the rumbling and the sinking of the ship in Part VII; Warren skates over this rather hastily:

There is the terrific sound which sinks the ship and flings the stunned Mariner into the Pilot's boat. In the logic of the symbolic structure this would be, I presume, a repetition of the wind or storm motif: the creative storm has a part in reestablishing the Mariner's relation to other men. Even if the destruction of the ship is regarded, as some readers regard it, as a final act of the Polar Spirit, to show, as it were, what he could do if he had a mind to, the symbolic import is not altered, for the Spirit belongs to the cluster of imagination which has the terrifying and cataclysmic as well as benign aspect.⁴⁶

He then argues that the sinking of the ship is not an act of the Polar Spirit, but of the angelic troop.

At the level of the primary theme, the angelic troop wipe out the crime (i.e. the 'criminal' ship and the dead bodies); at the level of the secondary theme, they do so by means of the 'storm' which belongs to the symbolic cluster of the imagination.⁴⁷

But this is surely to abandon a coherent symbolism altogether and to fall back on simple interpretation of the narrative in the light of decisions already made; for the clusters of symbols established earlier have borne some intelligible relation (either traditionally or in Coleridge's habitual associations) to what they symbolise: the creative wind is traditionally intelligible, and the moon and half-lights have special associations for Coleridge. But the method of the ship's destruction does not conform to the 'logic' of such symbolism as this; and Warren's use of 'I presume' points to his uneasiness about it.⁴⁸ A submarine rumbling followed by a violent explosion is in a different key; it has a different sort of effect on the reader from that of the other items which Warren groups together as associated with the Imagination.

What seems to have happened is that Mr. Warren, delighted by

the relative coherence of the moon-bird-mist-wind cluster, has forced other items into congruence with it, by minimising differences in their character and in their emotional effects. But such forcing would not have been necessary if he had started out with a less rigid theory of symbolic reference. That his own mind was working from the less precise towards the more precise, even in the course of thinking out his essay, is apparent in the way he speaks of the light of the sun. On p. 93 he writes of the sun:

It is the light which shows the familiar as familiar, it is the light of practical convenience, it is the light in which pride preens itself, it is, to adopt Coleridge's later terminology, the light of the 'understanding,' it is the light of that 'mere reflective faculty' that 'partook of Death.'

His mind is here moving out of what is richly and variously suggestive into what is precise and technical. I suggest that he went through a similar mental process in reaching the interpretation of the moon, the bird and the mist, and that in the result the 'theme of the imagination' is something narrower and more technical than the poem can carry. For by the imagination Warren does mean the technical, creative poet's imagination of Coleridge's later theory, and he says (p. 103) that the poem is 'in particular about poetry itself.' This leads to the conception of the Mariner as the *poète maudit*.

The fact, however, is that there was for Coleridge no such stable and exact association between moonlight, half-light, shifting lights-and-shadows, etc. and the specifically poetic and creative imagination. These were indeed associated with and productive of creative and visionary moods, but they were also associated with the more tender emotions and the more fruitful virtues, such as those of love. These lines, addressed to Tranquillity in 1801

And when the gust of Autumn crowds,
And breaks the busy moonlight clouds,
Thou best the thought canst raise, the heart attune,
Light as the busy clouds, calm as the gliding moon.⁴⁹

are part of the definition of a mood of moral insight which originally had a topically political context. This description of Hartley in a letter to Tom Poole in 1803 is expressive of the creativeness of a child's whole living personality, which may indeed bear analogies to poetic creativeness but yet, in a child, certainly cannot be identified with it:

Hartley is . . . a strange strange Boy—*'exquisitely wild'*! An utter Visionary! like the Moon among thin Clouds, he moves in a circle of Light of his own making—he alone, in a Light of his own. Of all human Beings I never yet saw one so naked of *Self*.⁵⁰

Again, the famous lines of 'Dejection: an Ode'

This light, this glory, this fair luminous mist,
This beautiful and beauty-making power⁵¹

describe not the 'shaping spirit of Imagination' itself, but the Joy which is the prerequisite condition of it. One more example brings us back closely to Mr. Warren's more limited application of the 'symbolism' of the moon. In the lines 'To William Wordsworth,' written after hearing the first version of *The Prelude* read aloud, Coleridge describes himself while listening as being like the sea under the influence of the moon:

In silence listening, like a devout child,
My soul lay passive, by thy various strain
Driven as in surges now beneath the stars,
With momentary stars of my own birth,
Fair constellated foam, still darting off
Into the darkness; now a tranquil sea,
Outspread and bright, yet swelling to the moon.⁵²

Here there is no doubt that the moon is an image of Wordsworth's imagination seen in its power over others. By contrast, at the other extreme of reference, is the Note-Book entry

Socinianism, moonlight; methodism, a stove. O for some sun to unite heat and light!⁵³

And in the intermediate, neutral area Coleridge once summed up his fascinated interest in the natural phenomena of a night-sky by applying to it the phrase of Boccaccio, *vestito d'una pallidezza affumicata*.⁵⁴

It would be endless to quote all Coleridge's uses of imagery from the moon and stars, clouds, the night-sky and uncertain lights; these examples give some idea of the range. It is certain that, before and after the time of 'The Ancient Mariner,' such images were used for creativeness both of a wider and of a more specially poetic kind; but they were used also for much else, especially in conjunction with the subtler processes of the mind and the more delicate modes of feeling. They were

used especially for the mysteries and uncertainties of mental life which Coleridge was beginning to explore more fully as he became more dissatisfied with the crude associationism represented by Hartley and its 'inanimate cold world,' and as his general ideals of life moved further from those of 'the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd.' It seems to me that the imagery of the mist and the moon and the Albatross in 'The Ancient Mariner' belongs with this area of experience in general and with Coleridge's exploration of it; indeed the whole poem is part of the exploration, it is part of the experience which led Coleridge into his later theoretic statements (as of the theory of the Imagination) rather than a symbolic adumbration of the theoretic statements themselves.

Within the poem, and most obviously in the motto later added from Burnet ('Harum rerum notitiam semper ambivit ingenium humanum, nunquam attigit.'), the emphasis is on the mystery and the richness of the mystery. Through the development of the imagery we are gradually led into the realisation that the values of 'the land of mist and snow' are of the greatest possible concern, but that they are indescribable. They are certainly contrasted with the values which belong to the specious day-to-day clarity of the sun, but they are left to establish themselves in us mysteriously and indefinitely, as Burnet's world of spirits is mysterious and indefinite. Mr. Warren has permanently enriched our understanding of the poem by insisting on its statement of the 'context of values' in which the crime and punishment and reconciliation occur; his symbolist 'equations' serve to point out elements which may be involved in this context; but the decision to 'adopt Coleridge's later terminology' in stating the equivalents symbolised has, in the long run, the effect of making the poem seem more technical and diagrammatic than Mr. Warren himself first found it, or than Coleridge could ever have admitted it to be.

NOTES

1. The other leading references are conveniently given in J. L. Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu* (London, 1931), pp. 222-4, 528-31. Cf. *Biographia Literaria*, Ch. xiv.

2. *The Complete Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. E. H. Coleridge (Oxford, 1912), I, 289, ll. 67-72.

3. *PW*, pp. 285-6, n. 1.

4. This review is reprinted in *Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism*, ed. T. M. Raysor (Cambridge, Mass., 1936), pp. 370-8.
5. For fuller details see Lowes, pp. 243-60.
6. R. C. Bald, 'Coleridge and *The Ancient Mariner*,' *Nineteenth Century Studies*, ed. Herbert Davis and Others (Cornell University Press, 1940), pp. 15ff.
7. See the Percy version of 'The Wandering Jew'; 'Sir Cauline' for some of the vocabulary; 'Young Waters' and 'King Estmere' especially for past tenses with 'did.' William Taylor's translation of Bürger's 'Lenore' must not be forgotten.
8. ll. 103-4; all quotations from the 'Mariner' are from the text in *PW*, I, 187-209.
9. ll. 107-10.
10. *Letters of S. T. Coleridge*, ed E. H. Coleridge (London, 1895), I, 403-4.
11. ll. 51-62.
12. Lowes, pp. 74ff.
13. ll. 199-202.
14. ll. 612-17.
15. E. M. W. Tillyard, *Five Poems*, pp. 66-86.
16. C. M. Bowra, *The Romantic Imagination*, Ch. iii.
17. 'A Poem of Pure Imagination,' in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (New York, 1946).
18. *BL*, II, 12.
19. *Five Poems*, pp. 70-1.
20. ll. 21-4.
21. l. 83.
22. Hdt. IV, 42, 3-4. Coleridge would certainly have known the passage in the original, and also, as Lowes shows (p. 127), the quotation and application of it in Bryan Edwards's *History . . . of the British Colonies in the West Indies*.
23. Wordsworth's famous, disingenuous and ungenerous note on the 'Mariner' was published in *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), I, on an unnumbered page after the text; quoted in full, Lowes, p. 520.
24. l. 286.
25. ll. 222-3.
26. Coleridge's 'Argument' to the edition of 1800 said the Mariner killed the bird 'cruelly and in contempt of the laws of hospitality.'
27. ll. 91-102.
28. *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), I, 162. The important comma after 'Angel's head' is omitted in *PW*, I, 190, *apparatus criticus*. Warren at this point seems to be mistaken: he accepts interpretation (b) for the text, but then goes on to argue that the mariners have a wrong view of God because 'dim and red' are qualities of the 'other light' group, and belong with the luminous haze, etc. But surely 'dim and red' are an anticipation of the evil 'bloody sun' that soon follows. Warren is far too exact in requiring every 'dim' light to be 'good'; and he underestimates the truth to physical fact about the tropic sun. See also Leo Kirschbaum, *The Explicator*, Vol. VII, No. 1, Oct. 1948. I thank

Mr. James Maxwell for this reference, which, in fact, introduced me to Warren's book.

29. ll. 232-5.
30. l. 250.
31. ll. 263-6.
32. See, e.g., 'Dejection: an Ode.'
33. ll. 272-6.
34. ll. 290-1.
35. See, e.g., Bowra, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-1.
36. The Fenwick Note to 'We Are Seven,' *Poetical Works*, ed. E. de Selincourt, I, 360-1; see also Lowes, pp. 222-3.
37. Warren, p. 71.
38. l. 2; *PW*, I, 5.
39. Warren here gives the publication date; the lines were written in 1793; *PW*, I, 40-4. The phrase quoted is in fact applied to Night, not to the Moon; ll. 85-7 are more relevant:

What time the pale moon sheds a softer day
Mellowing the woods beneath its pensive beam:
For mid the quivering light 'tis ours to play.

40. *BL*, II, 5.
41. ll. 75-8.
42. Warren, p. 91.
43. Warren, p. 79 and *passim*, quoting *BL*, I, 98.
44. Assuming that the sun does represent the Understanding, I think Mr. Warren makes his own case more difficult than he need when he comes to explain the appearance of the sun in a good context, when the angelic spirits fly up from the bodies into it. For surely to Coleridge the Understanding was never altogether unnecessary in the whole scheme of the mind's action. It was never altogether superseded, but was always a necessary ground of advance towards the Reason and the Imagination.
45. Warren, p. 97.
46. Warren, p. 100.
47. *ibid.*
48. And his writing of the Mariner being flung into the boat by the sound suggests some hasty reading here.
49. *PW*, I, 361.
50. *Unpublished Letters of S. T. Coleridge*, ed. E. L. Griggs (London, 1932), I, 292.
51. *PW*, I, 365.
52. ll. 95-101; *PW*, I, 408. Cf. Satyrane's First Letter in *The Friend*, 23 Nov. 1809, quoted in *PW ad loc.* The patches of phosphorescent light in the sea-foam are an image of Coleridge's troubled, but bright, reception of those moments in *The Prelude* in which he himself was involved.
53. *Anima Poetae*, ed. E. H. Coleridge (London, 1895), p. 26.
54. *ibid.*, p. 46.

"To William Wordsworth": Coleridge and the Art of Analogy

OF COLERIDGE'S later meditative poems, the most notable is "To William Wordsworth," written at Coleorton in January, 1807, after Wordsworth had recited his poem "on the growth of an individual Mind." Traditionally, readers have found it a window on Coleridge's personality and heard in its "confession voice" an uneven but moving *cri de coeur*.¹

Ah! as I listened with a heart forlorn,
The pulses of my being beat anew:
And even as Life returns upon the drowned,
Life's joy rekindling roused a throng of pains—
Keen pangs of Love, awakening as a babe
Turbulent, with an outcry in the heart;
And fears self-willed, that shunned the eye of Hope;
And Hope that scarce would know itself from Fear;
Sense of past Youth, and Manhood come in vain,
And Genius given, and Knowledge won in vain;
And all which I had culled in wood-walks wild,
And all which patient toil had reared, and all,
Commune with thee had opened out—but flowers
Strewed on my corse, and borne upon my bier,
In the same coffin, for the self-same grave! (61)

Hearing Wordsworth read what Dorothy called "the poem to Coleridge" might well have overwhelmed the artist in him. *The Prelude*

From *Forms of Lyric*, ed. Reuben A. Brower (Columbia Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 75-102. Copyright © 1970 by Columbia University Press. Reprinted, as revised by the author, by permission of the author and the publisher.

was, after all, the masterly product of years when Coleridge's own poetic creativity was most painfully in abeyance, his mind most subject to despair. The sojourn in Malta had failed to cure his troubles. He arrived at Coleorton in precarious health, still using opium, and without money or prospects. The continuing distress of working out a separation from his wife and children was intensified by the apparent harmony of the Wordsworth household, for him the embodiment of everything he so desperately idealized in human relations. For years, from 1797 when Coleridge heard "The Ruined Cottage" at Racedown to the evenings in 1807 when he again listened, this time to a poem he had helped conceive, the intimacy of William's world, which now included Wordsworth's sister-in-law, Sara Hutchinson, charmed and excluded him. The stimulating friendship with Wordsworth himself cost Coleridge dearly. He invested Wordsworth with a power destructive of his own self-assurance. The older poet had become to him little less than a father-figure, focus of the ambivalent affection and rivalry such oedipal transferences entail. Shortly after his arrival at Coleorton, for example, Coleridge's neurotic fantasy coupled William and Sara in an unthinkable adultery that for Coleridge had all the taboo of incest.

Such biographical considerations pertain to an adequate reading of "To William Wordsworth." But they do not in themselves comprehend the nature of the poem, which is more than a transparent expression of distress. Beyond question, the "personality" is there: in 1815 Coleridge himself reassured Wordsworth, who feared embarrassment if the poem was published, that he

wanted no additional reason for its not being published in my *Life* Time, than it's *personality* respecting myself—After the opinions, I had given publicly, for the preference of the *Lycidas* (moral no less than poetical) to Cowley's *Monody*, I could not have printed it consistently—. It is for the Biographer, not the Poet, to give the *accidents* of *individual* Life. What ever is not representative, generic, may indeed be poetically exprest, but is not Poetry.²

The appeal to aesthetic principle may have been a pretext to allay Wordsworth's fears, for if Coleridge had not already done so, in a few months he made the decision to publish the poem in *Sibylline Leaves*, with Wordsworth's identity only thinly veiled.³ But he also did what he could to rid the poem of purely personal and accidental elements, since for him the poem was never merely an egregiously autobiograph-

ical lament. However, readers have neglected its "representative" and "generic" nature. And the mention of "Lycidas" in his letter was no casual gesture, as Wordsworth knew. An important artistic design informs "To William Wordsworth," but it cannot be discerned by criticism focusing primarily on tone and diction and operating on the premise that structure and style in romantic poetry are chiefly expressions of psychological forces in the poet's personality.

I

This is not to say that Coleridge's inclination as a poet (or critic) was toward objectivist formalism. He was the most purposefully egotistic writer of his day, and the aim of this essay is to explore the subtle egotism of his poem to Wordsworth. As early as 1796 he defended egotism in his poems: "If I could judge of others by myself, I should not hesitate to affirm, that the most interesting passages in our most interesting poems are those in which the Author develops his own feelings." But there was a difference between "personality," dealing with the "*accidents of individual Life*," and its development into egotism. True egotism was not idiosyncratic or accidental. On such grounds in 1819 he acknowledged the weakness of another poem, the "Hymn Before Sunrise," as consisting

in the Author's addressing himself to *individual* objects actually present to his Senses while his great predecessors apostrophize *classes* of Things, presented by the memory and generalized by the understanding.⁴

At the end of his life, he was still elaborating the same insight:

In the *Paradise Lost*—indeed, in every one of his poems—it is Milton himself whom you see; his Satan, his Adam, his Raphael, almost his Eve—all are John Milton; and it is a sense of this intense egotism that gives me the greatest pleasure in reading Milton's works. The egotism of such a man is a revelation of spirit.⁵

Like Wordsworth, Milton was a figure of awesome authority whose genius inspired Coleridge. "What joy to meet a Milton in a future state, &, with that reverence due to a superior, pour forth our deep thanks for the noble feelings, he had aroused in us." But such reverence was also problematic for an imagination bent on competing and able to discern in the mirror of Milton's career an accusing reflection of his own plight:

No one can rise from the perusal of this immortal poem [*Paradise Lost*] without a deep sense of the grandeur and the purity of Milton's soul, or without feeling how susceptible of domestic enjoyments he really was, notwithstanding the discomforts which actually resulted from an apparently unhappy choice in marriage. He was, as every truly great poet has ever been, a good man; but finding it impossible to realize his own aspirations, either in religion or politics, or society, he gave up his heart to the living spirit and light within him, and avenged himself on the world by enriching it with this record of his own transcendent ideal.⁶

Coleridge knew that in interpreting Hamlet he drew an acute self-portrait. The same may be said of his response to both Milton and Wordsworth: each lived in his mind as an ideal representation of the figure within himself struggling for being. But the strength with which his mind endowed them fettered his own potential. In Milton, and increasingly in Wordsworth as his own prospects dimmed after the Nether Stowey years, he saw the figure he might have been, an ideal phantom of himself hovering in merciless rebuke of his own inadequacies. His most salutary influence on Wordsworth was to encourage him in a very Coleridgean undertaking, the use of his powers to scrutinize his own feelings and, especially in *The Prelude*, his own mental development. But in so encouraging him, he helped make Wordsworth into a successful version of his own failed self. The poem he listened to at Coleorton was addressed to himself, but in a sense it was also a poem whose authorship he could share. But most important, in the reawakened distress of his relationship to Wordsworth, who more and more seemed to possess the power of Milton, Coleridge heard *The Prelude* as an elegy for himself, an elegy he had helped shape.

"To William Wordsworth" is Coleridge's counter-elegy. It is antiphonal to what he heard in Wordsworth's poem, conceived as though the whelmed poet was answering the verses sung over him by his sorrowing friend. From an objective viewpoint, his "hearing" of *The Prelude* was extravagant. Wordsworth's intent was not, of course, to bury Coleridge. Yet aspects of the poem drew from Coleridge's troubled but deliberate egotism a responsive funeral hymn, itself shaped in unique ways by "Lycidas."

Not that his response was purely neurotic. Wordsworth's address to his friend occasionally does sound aloof and condescending. But the immediate impetus in *The Prelude* for Coleridge's adaptation of the pastoral mode came from the major apostrophe to him at the end of Book Ten, the longest of a handful of passages when "the poem to

Coleridge" addresses him in more than casual salutation.⁷ The passage comes as a landing-place in *The Prelude*, just after Wordsworth's account of his moral despair and the healing ministry at Racedown of Coleridge and Dorothy. In late 1804, however, when Wordsworth wrote the passage, it was Coleridge who, in his own crisis of despair, had undertaken the Malta exile in search of health. Though at Grasmere there was not much news of him—they knew he was in Sicily briefly as a government emissary from Malta—the Wordsworths had every reason to hope he had found conditions for coping with addiction and recovering health. It was much to Wordsworth's purpose to contemplate Coleridge in Sicily, for just as his own earlier despair had come over the degeneration of the political experiment in France, he could imagine the similar effect of Sicily's wretched decline on his friend,

who now,
 Among the basest and the lowest fallen
 Of all the race of men, dost make abode
 Where Etna looketh down on Syracuse,
 The City of Timoleon! Living God!
 How are the Mighty prostrated! they first,
 They first of all that breathe should have awaked
 When the great voice was heard from out the tombs
 Of ancient Heroes. If for France I have griev'd
 Who, in the judgment of no few, hath been
 A trifier only, in her proudest day,
 Have been distress'd to think of what she once
 Promised, now is, a far more sober cause
 Thine eyes must see of sorrow, in a Land
 Strew'd with the wreck of loftiest years, a Land
 Glorious indeed, substantially renown'd
 Of simple virtue once, and manly praise,
 Now without one memorial hope, not even
 A hope to be deferr'd; for that would serve
 To cheer the heart in such entire decay. (947)

But the land of Theocritus was also a setting appropriate to the elegiac resolution Wordsworth wished to invoke, on the model of "Lycidas":

But indignation works where hope is not,
 And thou, O Friend! wilt be refresh'd. There is
 One great Society alone on earth,

The noble Living and the noble Dead:
Thy consolation shall be there, and Time
And Nature shall before thee spread in store
Imperishable thoughts, and the Place itself
Be conscious of thy presence, and the dull
Sirocco air of its degeneracy
Turn as thou mov'st into a healthful breeze
To cherish and invigorate thy frame.
Thine be those motions strong and sanative
A ladder for thy Spirit to reascend
To health and joy and pure contentedness. . . . (987)

Just as, in Milton's poem, the shepherd's grief modulates to a heady vision of ultimate salvation for Lycidas, so here the poet's lament for a Sicily weltering to the parching wind ("the dull/Sirocco air of its degeneracy") shifts to a pleasing vision of Coleridge's restoration to health through the familiar motif of the correspondent breeze. The immortality of Lycidas, entertained by "all the Saints above,/In solemn troops, and sweet societies/That sing," has a closely conceived analogue in "Imperishable thoughts" that will console Coleridge in "the one great society on earth," thoughts prompted by the salutary intercourse of wretched landscape and indignant poetic consciousness.

The next lines, in which Wordsworth draws most openly on the language of "Lycidas," turn from this putative Coleridgean lament over Sicily to his own grief at his friend's absence from England in troubled times. Here Milton's Angel Michael, "the great vision of the guarded Mount," provides the model for Wordsworth's allegorical figure of Freedom, in her English refuge after the French debacle:

To me the grief confined that Thou art gone
From this last spot of earth where Freedom now
Stands single in her only sanctuary,
A lonely wanderer, art gone, by pain
Compell'd and sickness, at this latter day,
This heavy time of change for all mankind. (981)

In what follows, Wordsworth invokes Coleridge's own meditative poems, "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" and "Frost at Midnight," quietly superimposing their shape and gestures on his adaptation of Miltonic elegy. Imitating the situation of "This Lime-Tree Bower," he addresses his absent, wandering friend, just as Coleridge in that poem addressed Charles Lamb and the Wordsworths. Sadly alone and aban-

doned to his melancholy, Wordsworth finds even the *locus amoenus* of his memory, like Coleridge's Bower, without its wonted power to cheer:

My own delights do scarcely seem to me
My own delights; the lordly Alps themselves,
Those rosy Peaks, from which the Morning looks
Abroad on many Nations, are not now
Since thy migration and departure, Friend,
The gladsome image in my memory
Which they were used to be. (990)

In Coleridge's earlier poem the release from the prison of dejection comes through imagined sharing of Lamb's joy in the landscape Coleridge and the Wordsworths knew from their walks in the Quantock Hills. That sharing culminates in an act of blessing:

Yes! they wander on
In gladness all; but thou, methinks, most glad,
My gentle-hearted Charles! for thou hast pined
And hungered after Nature, many a year,
In the great City pent, winning thy way
With sad yet patient soul, through evil and pain
And strange calamity! Ah! slowly sink
Behind the western ridge, thou glorious Sun!
Shine in the slant beams of the sinking orb,
Ye purple heath-flowers! richlier burn, ye clouds!
Live in the yellow light, ye distant groves!
And kindle, thou blue Ocean!
(“This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison,” 26-37)

Wordsworth's adaptation of this locates Coleridge in a Sicilian landscape:

to kindred scenes,
On errand, at a time how different!
Thou tak'st thy way, carrying a heart more ripe
For all divine enjoyment, with the soul
Which Nature gives to Poets, now by thought
Matur'd, and in the summer of its strength.
Oh! wrap him in your Shades, ye Giant Woods,
On Etna's side, and thou, O flowery Vale
Of Enna! is there not some nook of thine,
From the first playtime of the infant earth
Kept sacred to restorative delight? (996)

Then, compounding his art, he imitates the turn backward through memory to schoolboy dreams that serves as a regenerative gesture for Coleridge's vexed mind in "Frost at Midnight." The turn also involves a pointed echo of "Lycidas" ("And, O ye dolphins, waft the hapless youth") and of the moment of resurgence in "This Lime-Tree Bower" ("A delight/Comes sudden on my heart"):

Child of the mountains, among Shepherds rear'd,
Even from my earliest school-day time, I lov'd
To dream of Sicily; and now a strong
And vital promise wafted from that Land
Comes o'er my heart; there's not a single name
Of note belonging to that honor'd isle,
Philosopher or Bard, Empedocles,
Or Archimedes, deep and tranquil Soul!
That is not like a comfort to my grief. . . . (1007)

The solace Wordsworth derives from this roster of ancient Sicilian worthies resembles what the lime-tree bower afforded its liberated prisoner:

Henceforth I shall know
That Nature ne'er deserts the wise and pure;
No plot so narrow, be but Nature there,
No waste so vacant, but may well employ
Each faculty of sense, and keep the heart
Awake to Love and Beauty!
("This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison," 59-64)

Still another Sicilian analogy Wordsworth finds in the Theocritean tale of King Comates. Coleridge, imprisoned in ill health and grief (again the parallel with "This Lime-Tree Bower"), nevertheless, like Comates, will bring to the pastoral landscape the poetic imagination to prevail over the circumstances of his plight, by that grace of spirit achieving the miracle of release.

yea, not unmov'd
When thinking of my own beloved Friend
I hear thee tell how bees with honey fed
Divine Comates, by his tyrant lord
Within a chest imprison'd impiously
How with their honey from the fields they came
And fed him there, alive, from month to month,
Because the Goatherd, blessed Man! had lips
Wet with the Muse's Nectar. (1016)

Finally, in reminiscence of the conclusion to "Frost at Midnight," the benevolent imagining of his friend's resurgent joy in the Sicilian beauties brightens his own spirit and culminates in a vision of Coleridge on Etna:

Thus I soothe
The pensive moments by this calm fire side,
And find a thousand fancied images
That cheer the thoughts of those I love, and mine.
Our prayers have been accepted; Thou wilt stand
Not as an Exile but a Visitant
On Etna's top; by pastoral Arethuse
Or, if that fountain be in truth no more,
Then near some other Spring, which by the name
Thou gratulatest, willingly deceived,
Shalt linger as a gladsome Votary,
And not a Captive, pining for his home. (1028)

Released, like Lamb, from pining captivity, this Coleridge is also the theorist of the imagination Wordsworth knew, "willingly deceived" with its fictions. But Wordsworth's boldest, most unlooked-for analogy is from *Paradise Lost*. In the eleventh book, Milton describes the dazzling descent of the Archangel Michael, the "great visitant" who, in answer to Adam's prayers after the fall, with

the heav'nly Bands
Down from a sky of Jasper lighted now
In Paradise, and on a Hill made alt,
A glorious apparition. (XI, 208-11)

This final analogy, between a fully regenerate Coleridge and Milton's sublime archangel, seems an extravagant triumph of generous and amused affection. It is true that Coleridge's speculative intelligence dazzled William and Dorothy, but they were hardly inclined to allow him the total moral authority that invests Michael when he brings the vision of human history to the fallen Adam and Eve. A similar judgment can be made about the *Prelude* passage as a whole, which is "un-Wordsworthian" in style and digressive from the poem's central concerns. Agile as imitation and resourceful in analogy, it nevertheless does not go beyond deft literary pastiche, and in its failure of coalescence between playful tribute and the investment of moral power it falls short of Wordsworth's great poetic achievements in *The*

Prelude. In one sense, however, Wordsworth's subtle, complex appeal to the art of Coleridge's most successful meditative poems is more than a private, friendly salute: it indicates his recognition of the essential compatibility of that meditative mode and the emotional structure of elegy. It was a similar fusion Coleridge sought in "To William Wordsworth."

II

Book Ten must have stunned Coleridge. Not only had he betrayed Wordsworth's hopes, which came now simply to remind him of his continued degeneracy, but their expression in his own meditative mode gave painful emphasis to his poetic decline.

For we were nursed upon the self-same hill,
Fed the same flock, by fountain, shade, and rill.

Given the ambivalence of his emotional involvement with Wordsworth, it is not surprising that Coleridge felt moved to answer him in kind. What is surprising, under the circumstances, is that he could carry the elegiac motif further in a meditative poem of more daring structural unity, in its resourcefulness Coleridgean to the core. But "To William Wordsworth" is more than a feat of literary rivalry, a casual blending of "Lycidas" and his own meditative style. It is a poet's attempt to move beyond the accidental personality of his Coleridgean situation to a more adequate idea of self, an assertion of spiritual being. Prompted by Wordsworth's own inventive echoes of "Lycidas," he found in the analogue of the drowned poet a congenial challenge to the play of his imagination. A year later, lecturing on drama at the Surrey Institute, he defined such imaginative play in terms which help explain the achievement of his poem:

One great principle is common to all [the fine arts], a principle which probably is the condition of all consciousness, without which we should feel and imagine only by discontinuous moments, and be plants or animals instead of men. I mean that ever-varying balance, or balancing, of images, notions, or feelings (for I avoid the vague word, idea) conceived of as in opposition to each other; in short, the perception of identity and contrariety, the least degree of which constitutes *likeness*, the greatest absolute difference; but the infinite gradations between these two form all the play and all the interest of our intellectual and moral being, till it lead us to a feeling and an object more awful than

it seems to me compatible with even the present subject to utter aloud,
tho' I am most desirous to suggest it.⁸

With Coleridge then, in "To William Wordsworth," the play and interest of his intellectual and moral being is in balancing his relationship to Wordsworth with that of the two shepherd-poets in "Lycidas." Through the mediating effect of that analogy, Coleridge transformed his sense of personal plight into an assertion of triumphant release in an access of reflexive awareness.

Perhaps the chief reason why readers have treated the pastoral elegiac element in Coleridge's poem so casually is the competing prominence of his remarkable recapitulation of *The Prelude*. Lines eleven to forty-seven constitute an astonishingly deft critical précis of Wordsworth's poem, elaborating its themes in a linked series of thickly allusive clauses. At the same time, however, Coleridge announced the analogical context of his own undertaking with a baldly Miltonic opening:

Theme hard as high!
Of smiles spontaneous, and mysterious fears
(The first-born they of Reason and twin-birth),
Of tides obedient to external force,
And currents self-determined, as might seem,
Or by some inner Power; of moments awful,
Now in thy inner life, and now abroad,
When power streamed from thee, and thy soul received
The light reflected, as a light bestowed—
Of fancies fair, and milder hours of youth,
Hyblean murmurs of poetic thought
Industrious in its joy, in vales and glens
Native or outland, lakes and famous hills!
Or on the lonely high-road, when the stars
Were rising; or by secret mountain-streams,
The guides and the companions of thy way!
Of more than Fancy, of the Social Sense
Distending wide, and man beloved as man,
Where France in all her towns lay vibrating
Like some becalmed bark beneath the burst
Of Heaven's immediate thunder, when no cloud
Is visible, or shadow on the main,
For thou wert there, thine own brows garlanded,
Amid the tremor of a realm aglow,
Amid a mighty nation jubilant,

When from the general heart of human kind
 Hope sprang forth like a full-born Deity!
 —Of that dear Hope afflicted and struck down,
 So summoned homeward, thenceforth calm and sure
 From the dread watch-tower of man's absolute self,
 With light unwaning on her eyes, to look
 Far on—herself a glory to behold,
 The Angel of the vision! Then (last strain)
 Of Duty, chosen Laws controlling choice,
 Action and joy!—An Orphic song indeed,
 A song divine of high and passionate thoughts
 To their own music chaunted!

(11)

Coleridge does more here than merely summarize the argument of *The Prelude*. In focusing on the crisis of despair sustained by Wordsworth in the aftermath of the French Revolution, he draws an unmistakable analogy between the calm strength achieved by Wordsworth at Racedown upon his return to England and the strength imaginatively vested by Milton in Michael, "the great vision of the guarded Mount." Put another way, Coleridge, responding to Wordsworth's figure, in the passage from Book Ten, of Freedom standing "single in her only sanctuary," found in the language of "Lycidas" a powerful metaphor for the central theme of Wordsworth's poem: his development, out of affliction and despair and drawing on that experience, of an assured sense of self. For Coleridge, such strong egotism—what he so admired and envied in Milton and Wordsworth—was a fortress, a "dread watch-tower." The balance of identity and contrariety Coleridge created between the *Prelude* poet and Milton's angel is complex. Michael, gazing south "toward Namancos and Bayona's hold," is urged by the shepherd to "Look homeward . . . now"; with Coleridge, Wordsworth's sublime egotism in the latter part of his autobiography becomes a parabolic version of this: "summoned homeward," he is destined thenceforth "to look/Far on," to see (and here Coleridge is fully in touch with Wordsworth's argument) his own self as a projected vision, a "glory." He probably had in mind here the image of Wordsworth on Snowdon in Book Fourteen, gazing at the type of his own intellect in the moon shining on the rifted cloudscape, with the rising noise of waters. The careful echoes of the language of "Lycidas" (especially the "Look homeward, Angel" strewn over five lines) constitute more than a slyly punning code. They declare the essential link perhaps only Coleridge among contemporary poets would have cared

to declare, the link between the sense of self and the sense of the divine, self-knowledge being the one certain means to knowledge of God. It is significant that Coleridge found in the language of "Lycidas" an adequate idiom for his response to Wordsworth's achieved self-assurance. Central to his analogical purpose is his own sense of awe toward that language. No other tribute to Wordsworth could have cost more. Here the language of his 1808 Surrey Institute lecture is again helpful. To ponder the analogy between Wordsworth and Michael, he might have said,

leads us to a feeling and an object more awful than it seems to me compatible with even the present subject to utter aloud, tho' I am most desirous to suggest it. For there alone are all things at once different and the same; there alone, as the principle of all things, does distinction exist unaided by division—will and reason, succession of time and unmoving eternity, infinite change and ineffable rest.

It is toward such a self-sufficient harmony that Coleridge heard *The Prelude* moving:

Then (last strain)
Of Duty, chosen Laws controlling choice,
Action and joy!—An Orphic song indeed,
A song divine of high and passionate thoughts
To their own music chaunted! (43)

The abject "confession" following (quoted above, p. 240) is part, then, of the larger elegiac structure, corresponding to the forlorn lament in "Lycidas." In an early draft of his answering poem, he acknowledged the turmoil of feeling Wordsworth's pity and hope engendered:

Comfort from Thee and utterance of thy Love
Came with such heights and depths of Harmony
Such sense of Wings uplifting, that the Storm
Scatter'd and whirl'd me, till my Thoughts became
A bodily Tumult! and thy faithful Hopes,
Thy Hopes of me, dear Friend! by me unfelt
Were troublous to me. . . .⁹

Coleridge thus depicts himself as another Lycidas, scattered and whirled, in the aftermath of his own wrecked career. Wordsworth's glorious self-sufficiency evokes a tempest of despair, his Orphic song

agitating the frantic imagination of a drowning man. Under the strong sway of that music, Coleridge becomes Lycidas, overwhelmed with contrasting failure and wasted gifts. But immediate and "genuine" as the confessional seems, its pathos is mediated through the larger design of the poem, just as the larger comic movement of "Lycidas" leads anguish to resolution. With glances at Milton's language pointing the chosen, controlling context, Coleridge's abrupt turn is more cogent than the similar repudiation of "viper thoughts" in "Dejection":

That way no more! and ill beseems it me
Who came a welcomer in herald's guise
Singing of Glory and Futurity,
To wander back on such unhealthful road,
Plucking the poisons of self-harm! And ill
Such intertwine beseems triumphal wreaths
Strew'd before thy advancing! (76)

The impulses of rueful anxiety, leaves shattered before the mellowing year, are rejected as self-destructive and unseemly. Simultaneously, as with Milton's poem, counter-elegy moves toward orthodoxy: Coleridge assumes a heraldic role for Wordsworth's entry into a poetic Jerusalem. To retreat into despair at his own unfulfilled promise is to refuse this higher decorum. In Coleridge's poem, as in "Lycidas," elegiac and Christian structures are one: the paradigm toward which the unsettled psyche wills itself.

If one hears the isolated "confession" as the true voice of feeling, as do readers for whom the final version of "Dejection" is at best an ambiguous triumph of art over passion, the movement beginning at line 76 will seem strained falsification on Coleridge's part, a disavowal, in shame and defensiveness, of the selfish jealousy of an insecure mind. Such readers will tend to identify pathetic intensity with poetic power, and to them there is no adequate reply beyond what Coleridge himself might have said, that the use of a wretched despair is precisely in providing the imagination with an occasion for release into an ecstasy of self-awareness unavailable to a mind in steadier equanimity. Or, as he put it to Thomas Clarkson four months before writing the poem,

with a certain degree of satisfaction to my own mind I can define the human Soul to be that class of Being, as far as we are permitted to know, the first and lowest of the Class, which is endued with a reflex consciousness of it's own continuousness, and the great end and pur-

pose of all its energies & sufferings is the growth of that reflex consciousness.¹⁰

Put still another way he discovers intellectual and moral being through pursuit of abstracted analogy. In the poem, release comes through the likeness, discerned by the play of imagination in mediating the identity and contrariety, between his reception of *The Prelude* and the fate of Lycidas.

The drowning poet's repudiation of solipsistic grief leads him to admonish his mourning friend against unseemly pity "already felt too long!" But he will not be held vindictive. "Nor let my words impart more blame than needs." As "personality" this is pusillanimous suppression of hostility for a crowned rival. But in a poem that moves beyond personality, the imputation of blame is checked less by insecure dependency on his mourner than by the willed pattern of counter-elegy, already proleptic of release. For a figure to announce that salvation Coleridge turned to the "birds of calm" in Milton's "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity": for them, in the midst of "winter wild," the tumult (like the storm in "Dejection") rose and ceased. In Coleridge's recasting,

Peace is nigh
Where Wisdom's voice has found a listening heart.
Amid the howl of more than wintry storms,
The Halcyon hears the voice of vernal hours
Already on the wing. (87)

Coleridge was ready enough to discern an echo of divine creative music in authentic acts of the poetic imagination such as he heard in *The Prelude*. And the likeness implied by extending the analogy, between a Miltonic nature's sacramental response to that music and his own reaction to Wordsworth's voice, is fully consonant with the argument carefully elaborated to Clarkson. God's action on the soul of man "awakes in it a conscience of actions within itself analogous to the divine action." The ultimate, definitive divine act, that of creative self-comprehension ("I AM"), could be grasped by the human mind only through the analogy of growth in awareness of one's own "continuousness." Growth in the power of such reflection was "the first approach to, & shadow of, the divine Permanency, the first effort of the divine working in us to bind the Past and Future with the Present, and thereby to let in upon us some faint glimmering of that

State in which Past, Present, and Future are co-adunated in the adorable I AM."¹¹ Wordsworth, like Milton's dancing Pleiades "shedding sweet influence," lets in upon Coleridge such glimmering:

O great Bard!
Ere yet that last strain dying awed the air,
With steadfast eye I viewed thee in the choir
Of ever-enduring men. The truly great
Have all one age, and from one visible space
Shed influence! They, both in power and act,
Are permanent, and Time is not with them,
Save as it worketh for them, they in it. (47)

A sense of one's continuousness—literally, a sense of past and future bound to an ontological present—is for Coleridge inconceivable "without the action of kindred souls on each other." This is the hinge of his hypothesis. It accounts for the crucial role of the Friend in Coleridge's meditative poems. "Man is truly altered by the coexistence of other men; his faculties cannot be developed in himself alone, & only by himself." So it takes Wordsworth to bring Coleridge to a sense of his own past and future, "in which the individual is capable of being itself contemplated as a Species of itself, namely, by its conscious continuousness moving on in an unbroken Line."¹²

But that is not all. The mediation of another fosters participation in what Coleridge called "One Life," through which "the whole Species is capable of being regarded as one individual." Transcending the limitations of the separately conceived self, lost in querulousness and melancholy, takes place not by a release from the burden of self-demand that entails a diminishing of self. The paradox is that "every Thing has a Life of its own, and that we are all *one Life*."¹³ If we read "To William Wordsworth" without understanding the analogies by which Coleridge projects his commitment to such a larger "Life," the poem will seem only an inventive and pathetic gesture commemorating an emotional experience. The poem argues for a mode of being that assumes a more radically Christian analysis of human life than most readers, even in Coleridge's time, would recognize. But because that analysis permits also the celebration of self (though at the point where self is part of a larger life), this meditative poem, like so many others Coleridge wrote, seems to anticipate the meditative verse of our own day.

The last section of the poem is a lingering narrative of his pleasure

in the intimate household at Coleorton, with the super-added pleasure of the recitation:

Eve following eve,
Dear tranquil time, when the sweet sense of Home
Is sweetest! moments for their own sake hailed
And more desired, more precious, for thy song. . . . (91)

But such simplicity is deceptive. The poem has not reverted to an unmediated, merely personal narrative. In a very Coleridgean touch, the ensuing imagery reasserts the governing pastoral analogy, with the fate of Lycidas in view, if not fully prominent view. Eight years before, on the packet boat to Germany, he had noted the appearance of the phosphorescent sea, and, casting about in 1807 for imagery adequate to his meditation on spiritual death and rebirth, he turned back to that voyage with William and Dorothy (which had inaugurated an earlier release to a prosperous exile), when he

lay in the Boat, and looked at the water, the foam of which, that beat against the Ship & coursed along by it's sides, & darted off over the Sea, was full of stars of flame.¹⁴

Recalling that phenomenon at Coleorton, Coleridge found a metaphor to suggest the likeness between the motion of the drowned body of Lycidas in Milton's changing seas and his own response to the "various strain" of Wordsworth's poem:

In silence listening, like a devout child,
My soul lay passive, by thy various strain
Driven as in surges now beneath the stars,
With momentary stars of my own birth,
Fair constellated foam, still darting off
Into the darkness; now a tranquil sea,
Outspread and bright, yet swelling to the moon. (95)

A longer adaptation of his original description appeared in *The Friend* in 1809:

A beautiful white cloud of Foam at momentarily intervals coursed by the side of the Vessel with a Roar, and little stars of flame danced and sparkled and went out in it: and every now and then light detachments of this white cloud-like foam dashed off from the vessel's side, each with its own small constellation, over the Sea, and scoured out of sight like a Tartar Troop over a wilderness.¹⁵

Behind this language and that of the poem is Milton's account in *Paradise Lost* of the excursions of Satan, Sin, and Death through Chaos after the fall, a passage too long to give here.¹⁶ These echoes in Coleridge reinforce the suggestion of the Lycidas analogy that the drowning poet's momentary, despairing plunge is into a hellish confusion,

Where thou perhaps under the whelming tide
Visit'st the bottom of the monstrous world.

His figure is a rich emblem. Perhaps the darting marine constellations miming the steady Wordsworthian heavens are an allusion to his own ephemeral lines in imitative response to Wordsworth's apostrophe. There are strong Platonic overtones. And it is useful to recall that he occasionally brooded over alphabetical shapes in the night skies, especially the brilliant "W" of Cassiopoeia. In notebook verses from 1807, the extremity of despair is the false starless night of a solar eclipse:

What never is but only is to be
This is not Life—
O Hopeless Hope, and Death's Hypocrisy!
And with perpetual Promise, breaks its Promises—
The Stars that wont to start, as on a chase,
And twinkling insult on Heaven's darkened Face,
Like a conven'd Conspiracy of Spies
Wink at each other with confiding eyes,
Turn from the portent, all is blank on high,
No constellations alphabet the Sky.—
The Heavens one large black Letter only shews,
And as a Child beneath its master's Blows
Shrills out at once its Task and its Affright,
The groaning World now learns to read aright,
And with its Voice of Voices cries out, O!¹⁷

But intervening in this chaos is a mystic tranquility, "outspread and bright, yet swelling to the moon." The image recalls the honeydew words of the second voice in the Ancient Mariner's vision:

"Still as a slave before his lord,
The ocean hath no blast;
His great bright eye most silently
Up to the Moon is cast—

If he may know which way to go;
For she guides him smooth or grim.

See, brother, see! how graciously
She looketh down on him."

Such powerful, calming grace is symbolic of the ultimate "divine action" Coleridge heard in Wordsworth's voice, the redemptive efficacy of "The dear might of him that walk'd the waves":

And when—O Friend! my comforter and guide!
Strong in thyself, and powerful to give strength!—
Thy long sustained Song finally closed,
And thy deep voice had ceased—yet thou thyself
Wert still before my eyes, and round us both
That happy vision of beloved faces—
Scarce conscious, and yet conscious of its close
I sate, my being blended in one thought
(Thought was it? or aspiration? or resolve?)
Absorbed, yet hanging still upon the sound—
And when I rose, I found myself in prayer. (102)

In this conclusion, what at the level of personality would be blasphemy, fraught with Coleridge's problematic, self-abnegating reverence for Wordsworth, is offered instead at the level of egotism as the validation of the "One Life." Under the sway of analogy, Coleorton is Kingdom Come, where "entertain him all the Saints above,/ In solemn troops, and sweet societies/ That sing."

Wordsworth's genial apostrophe ended by investing his friend with an archangelic mantle. Coleridge's description of an ineffable intercourse following Wordsworth's recitation may return the compliment by echoing the pause after Raphael's account of creation:

The Angel ended, and in Adam's Ear
So Charming left his voice, that he a while
Thought him still speaking, still stood fixt to hear. (VIII, 1-3)

The celestial condition of mind has its analogue for Coleridge in a meditative climax, where understanding, hope, and will fuse in a resurgence of spirit tantamount to resurrection. The analogue thus recalls the gesture of Milton's uncouth swain:

At last he rose, and twitched his mantle blue:
Tomorrow to fresh woods, and pastures new.

One last speculation on the part of the poet who told his nephew that "Elegy is the form of poetry natural to the reflective mind" will help put the state toward which his poem moves in perspective as more than an occasional neurotic whim.¹⁸ *Blackwood's* in 1821 published a selection "from Mr. Coleridge's literary correspondence" in which he urged the deliberate exertion of a meditative habit

as a source of support and consolation in circumstances under which we might otherwise sink back on ourselves, and for want of colloquy with our thoughts, with the objects and presentations of the inner sense, lie listening to the fretful *ticking* of our sensations. . . . something is already gained, if, instead of attending to our sensations, we begin to *think* of them. But in order to do this, we must reflect on these thoughts—or the same *sameness* will soon sink them down into mere feeling. And in order to sustain the act of reflection on our thoughts, we are obliged more and more to compare and generalize them, a process that to a certain extent implies, and in a still greater degree excites and introduces the act and power of abstracting the thoughts and images from their original cause, and of reflecting on them with less and less reference to the individual suffering that had been their first subject. The *vis mediatrix* of Nature is at work for us in all our faculties and habits, the associate, reproductive, comparative, and combinatory.¹⁹

The inclination, unsurprising in an age that has seen the development of the art of psychoanalysis, to find confessions of anxiety more interesting than professions of faith has probably contributed to the emphasis placed on "To William Wordsworth" as the mirror of a forlorn mind. The balance in the poem between the order of art and the unshapely energy of emotion may be precarious, but there seems no legitimate basis for misconceiving the nature of Coleridge's undertaking or for seeing in his analogical meditation only an elaborate strategy to conceal frustration and guilt. Not disavowing but recognizing the nature of his own ambivalent aspirations after Wordsworth's power, he turned "personal" anguish into strenuous charity, and avenged himself on his friend by enriching their relationship with a poem that recorded his own egotistic and transcendent ideal. Kathleen Coburn has said that the pathos of Coleridge's problems is that he is haunted by his inability to fix an image of himself.²⁰ The complex analogical argument of "To William Wordsworth" posits one image of a "self" toward which he aspired most consciously and consistently. It is a thoughtful image, if an ephemeral one, and at least for the life of the

poem it modifies the figure we are otherwise likely to project from dispassionate scrutiny of his personal proclivities and circumstances.

NOTES

1. Cf. Max F. Schulz, *The Poetic Voices of Coleridge* (Detroit, 1963), pp. 132-34. Quotations from "To William Wordsworth" are from *Poetical Works*, ed. E. H. Coleridge (Oxford, 1912). Numbers in parentheses identify the first line of each passage.
2. *Collected Letters*, ed. E. L. Griggs (Oxford, 1956-1971), IV, 572.
3. He had already written to Joseph Cottle and Lord Byron about the collection that became *Sibylline Leaves*. See *Collected Letters*, IV, 546-47, 551-52, 559-63.
4. *Collected Letters*, IV, 974.
5. *Table Talk*, August 18, 1833, in *Complete Works*, ed. W. G. T. Shedd (New York, 1854), VI, 479.
6. *Coleridge on the Seventeenth Century*, ed. R. F. Brinkley (Durham, N.C., 1955), p. 579.
7. Quotations, identified by the number of the first line, are from the "1805-6" text in *The Prelude*, ed. E. de Selincourt and H. Darbishire (Oxford, 1959). This text is de Selincourt's collation of two manuscript copies completed by early 1806 and is the closest available approximation to the poem Coleridge heard.
8. *Shakespeare Criticism*, ed. T. M. Raysor (London, 1960), I, 181-82.
9. *Poetical Works*, II, 1082-83.
10. *Collected Letters*, II, 1197.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*, II, 864.
14. *Collected Letters*, I, 425.
15. *The Friend* (*The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Vol. IV) ed. Barbara E. Rooke (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), II, 193.
16. *Paradise Lost*, X, 410-59.
17. *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn (London, 1957-), Vol. II, entry no. 3107.
18. *Table Talk*, October 23, 1833, in *Complete Works*, VI, 491.
19. *Complete Works*, IV, 432-33.
20. "Reflections in a Coleridge Mirror: Some Images in His Poems," in *From Sensibility to Romanticism*, ed. F. W. Hilles and H. Bloom (Oxford, 1965), p. 433.

T. S. ELIOT

Byron

THE facts of a large part of Byron's life have been well set forth, in the last few years, by Sir Harold Nicolson and Mr. Quennell, who have also provided interpretations which accord with each other and which make the character of Byron more intelligible to the present generation. No such interpretation has yet been offered in our time for Byron's verse. In and out of universities, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley and Keats have been discussed from various points of view: Byron and Scott have been left in peace. Yet Byron, at least, would seem the most nearly remote from the sympathies of every living critic: it would be interesting, therefore, if we could have half a dozen essays about him, to see what agreement could be reached. The present article is an attempt to start that ball rolling.

There are several initial difficulties. It is difficult to return critically to a poet whose poetry was—I suppose it was for many of our contemporaries, except those who are too young to have read any of the poetry of that period—the first boyhood enthusiasm. To be told anecdotes of one's own childhood by an elderly relative is usually tedious; and a return, after many years, to the poetry of Byron is accompanied by a similar gloom: images come before the mind, and the recollection of some verses in the manner of *Don Juan*, tinged with that disillusion and cynicism only possible at the age of sixteen, which appeared in a school periodical. There are more impersonal obstacles to overcome. The bulk of Byron's poetry is distressing, in proportion to its quality; one would

From *On Poetry and Poets*, copyright 1943, 1945, 1951, 1954, 1956, 1957 by T. S. Eliot (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Inc., and Faber and Faber Ltd., London), pp. 193–206. Reprinted by permission of the publishers.

suppose that he never destroyed anything. Yet bulk is inevitable in a poet of Byron's type; and the absence of the destructive element in his composition indicates the kind of interest, and the kind of lack of interest, that he took in poetry. We have come to expect poetry to be something very concentrated, something distilled; but if Byron had distilled his verse, there would have been nothing whatever left. When we see exactly what he was doing, we can see that he did it as well as it can be done. With most of his shorter poems, one feels that he was doing something that Tom Moore could do as well or better; in his longer poems, he did something that no one else has ever equalled.

It is sometimes desirable to approach the work of a poet completely out of favour, by an unfamiliar avenue. If my avenue to Byron is a road that exists only for my own mind, I shall be corrected by other critics: it may at all events upset prejudice and encourage opinion to form itself anew. I therefore suggest considering Byron as a Scottish poet—I say 'Scottish,' not 'Scots,' since he wrote in English. The one poet of his time with whom he could be considered to be in competition, a poet of whom he spoke invariably with the highest respect, was Sir Walter Scott. I have always seen, or imagined that I saw, in busts of the two poets, a certain resemblance in the shape of the head. The comparison does honour to Byron, and when you examine the two faces, there is no further resemblance. Were one a person who liked to have busts about, a bust of Scott would be something one could live with. There is an air of nobility about that head, an air of magnanimity, and of that inner and perhaps unconscious serenity that belongs to great writers who are also great men. But Byron—that pudgy face suggesting a tendency to corpulence, that weakly sensual mouth, that restless triviality of expression, and worst of all that blind look of the self-conscious beauty; the bust of Byron is that of a man who was every inch the touring tragedian. Yet it was by being so thorough-going an actor that Byron arrived at a kind of knowledge: of the world outside, which he had to learn something about in order to play his role in it, and of that part of himself which was his role. Superficial knowledge, of course: but accurate so far as it went.

Of a Scottish quality in Byron's poetry, I shall speak when I come to *Don Juan*. But there is a very important part of the Byronic make-up which may appropriately be mentioned before considering his poetry, for which I think his Scottish antecedence provided the material. That is his peculiar diabolism, his delight in posing as a damned creature—and in providing evidence for his damnation in a rather horrifying way. Now, the diabolism of Byron is very different from anything that the

Romantic Agony (as Mr. Praz calls it) produced in Catholic countries. And I do not think it is easily derived from the comfortable compromise between Christianity and paganism arrived at in England and characteristically English. It could come only from the religious background of a people steeped in Calvinistic theology.

Byron's diabolism, if indeed it deserves the name, was of a mixed type. He shared, to some extent, Shelley's Promethean attitude, and the Romantic passion for Liberty; and this passion, which inspired his more political outbursts, combined with the image of himself as a man of action to bring about the Greek adventure. And his Promethean attitude merges into a Satanic (Miltonic) attitude. The romantic conception of Milton's Satan is semi-Promethean, and also contemplates Pride as a *virtue*. It would be difficult to say whether Byron was a proud man, or a man who liked to pose as a proud man—the possibility of the two attitudes being combined in the same person does not make them any less dissimilar in the abstract. Byron was certainly a vain man, in quite simple ways:

I can't complain, whose ancestors are there,
Erneis, Radulphus—eight-and-forty manors
(If that my memory doth not greatly err)
Were their reward for following Billy's banners. . . .

His sense of damnation was also mitigated by a touch of unreality: to a man so occupied with himself and with the figure he was cutting nothing outside could be altogether real. It is therefore impossible to make out of his diabolism anything coherent or rational. He was able to have it both ways, it seems; and to think of himself both as an individual isolated and superior to other men because of his own crimes, and as a naturally good and generous nature distorted by the crimes committed against it by others. It is this inconsistent creature that turns up as the Giaour, the Corsair, Lara, Manfred and Cain; only as Don Juan does he get nearer to the truth about himself. But in this strange composition of attitudes and beliefs the element that seems to me most real and deep is that of a perversion of the Calvinist faith of his mother's ancestors.

One reason for the neglect of Byron is, I think, that he has been admired for what are his most ambitious attempts to be poetic; and these attempts turn out, on examination, to be fake: nothing but sonorous affirmations of the commonplace with no depth of significance. A good specimen of such imposture is the well-known stanza at the end of Canto XV of *Don Juan*:

Between two worlds life hovers like a star,
 'Twixt night and morn, upon the horizon's verge.
 How little do we know that which we are!
 How less what we may be! The eternal surge
 Of time and tide rolls on, and bears afar
 Our bubbles; as the old burst, new emerge,
 Lashed from the foam of ages; while the graves
 Of empire heave but like some passing waves.

verses which are not too good for the school magazine. Byron's real excellence is on a different level from this.

The qualities of narrative verse which are found in *Don Juan* are no less remarkable in the earlier tales. Before undertaking this essay I had not read these tales since the days of my schoolboy infatuation, and I approached them with apprehension. They are readable. However absurd we find their view of life, they are, as tales, very well told. As a *tale-teller* we must rate Byron very high indeed: I can think of none other than Chaucer who has a greater readability; with the exception of Coleridge whom Byron abused and from whom Byron learned a great deal. And Coleridge never achieved a narrative of such length. Byron's plots, if they deserve that name, are extremely simple. What makes the tales interesting is first a torrential fluency of verse and a skill in varying it from time to time to avoid monotony; and second a genius for divagation. Digression, indeed, is one of the valuable arts of the story-teller. The effect of Byron's digressions is to keep us interested in the story-teller himself, and through this interest to interest us more in the story. On contemporary readers this interest must have been strong to the point of enchantment; for even still, once we submit ourselves to the point of reading a poem through, the attraction of the personality is powerful. Any few lines, if quoted in almost any company, will probably provide a momentary twitch of merriment:

Her eye's dark charm 'twere vain to tell,
 But gaze on that of the Gazelle,
 It will assist thy fancy well;
 As large, as languishingly dark,
 But Soul beam'd forth in every spark. . . .

but the poem as a whole can keep one's attention. *The Giaour* is a long poem, and the plot is very simple, though not always easy to follow. A Christian, presumably a Greek, has managed, by some means of which we are not told, to scrape acquaintance with a young woman who be-

longed to the harem, or was perhaps the favourite wife of a Moslem named Hassan. In the endeavour to escape with her Christian lover Leila is recaptured and killed; in due course the Christian with some of his friends ambushes and kills Hassan. We subsequently discover that the story of this vendetta—or part of it—is being told by the Giaour himself to an elderly priest, by way of making his confession. It is a singular kind of confession, because the Giaour seems anything but penitent, and makes quite clear that although he has sinned, it is not really by his own fault. He seems impelled rather by the same motive as the Ancient Mariner, than by any desire for absolution—which could hardly have been given: but the device has its use in providing a small complication to the story. As I have said, it is not altogether easy to discover what happened. The beginning is a long apostrophe to the vanished glory of Greece, a theme which Byron could vary with great skill. The Giaour makes a dramatic entrance:

Who thundering comes on blackest steed,
With slackened bit and hoof of speed?

and we are given a glimpse of him through a Moslem eye:

Though young and pale, that sallow front
Is scathed by fiery passion's brunt . . .

which is enough to tell us, that the Giaour is an interesting person, because he is Lord Byron himself, perhaps. Then there is a long passage about the desolation of Hassan's house, inhabited only by the spider, the bat, the owl, the wild dog and weeds; we infer that the poet has skipped on to the conclusion of the tale, and that we are to expect the Giaour to kill Hassan—which is of course what happens. Not Joseph Conrad could be more roundabout. Then a bundle is privily dropped into the water, and we suspect it to be the body of Leila. Then follows a reflective passage meditating in succession on Beauty, the Mind, and Remorse. Leila turns up again, alive, for a moment, but this is another dislocation of the order of events. Then we witness the surprise of Hassan and his train—this may have been months or even years after Leila's death—by the Giaour and his banditti, and there is no doubt but that Hassan is killed:

Fall'n Hassan lies—his unclosed eye
Yet lowering on his enemy. . . .

Then comes a delightful change of metre, as well as a sudden transition, just at the moment when it is needed:

The browsing camels' bells are tinkling:
His mother look'd from her lattice high—
She saw the dews of eve besprinkling
The pasture green beneath her eye,
She saw the planets faintly twinkling:
' 'Tis twilight—sure his train is nigh.'

Then follows a sort of exequy for Hassan, evidently spoken by another Moslem. Now the Giaour reappears, nine years later, in a monastery, as we hear one of the monks answering an inquiry about the visitor's identity. In what capacity the Giaour has attached himself to the monastery is not clear; the monks seem to have accepted him without investigation, and his behaviour among them is very odd; but we are told that he has given the monastery a considerable sum of money for the privilege of staying there. The conclusion of the poem consists of the Giaour's confession to one of the monks. Why a Greek of that period should have been so oppressed with remorse (although wholly impenitent) for killing a Moslem in what he would have considered a fair fight, or why Leila should have been guilty in leaving a husband or master to whom she was presumably united without her consent, are questions that we cannot answer.

I have considered the Giaour in some detail in order to exhibit Byron's extraordinary ingenuity in story-telling. There is nothing straightforward about the telling of the simple tale; we are not told everything that we should like to know; and the behaviour of the protagonists is sometimes as unaccountable as their motives and feelings are confused. Yet the author not only gets away with it, but gets away with it *as narrative*. It is the same gift that Byron was to turn to better account in *Don Juan*; and the first reason why *Don Juan* is still readable is that it has the same narrative quality as the earlier tales.

It is, I think, worth noting, that Byron developed the verse *conte* considerably beyond Moore and Scott, if we are to see his popularity as anything more than public caprice or the attraction of a cleverly exploited personality. These elements enter into it, certainly. But first of all, Byron's verse tales represent a more mature stage of this transient form than Scott's, as Scott's represent a more mature stage than Moore's. Moore's *Lalla Rookh* is a mere sequence of tales joined together by a ponderous prose account of the circumstances of their narration (mod-

elled upon the *Arabian Nights*). Scott perfected a straightforward story with the type of plot which he was to employ in his novels. Byron combined exoticism with actuality, and developed most effectively the use of *suspense*. I think also that the versification of Byron is the ablest: but in this kind of verse it is necessary to read at length if one is to form an impression, and relative merit cannot be shown by quotation. To identify every passage taken at random as being by Byron or by Moore would be connoisseurship beyond my powers; but I think that anyone who had recently read Byron's tales would agree that the following passage could not be by him:

And oh! to see the unburied heaps
On which the lonely moonlight sleeps—
The very vultures turn away,
And sicken at so foul a prey!
Only the fierce hyaena stalks
Throughout the city's desolate walks
At midnight, and his carnage plies—
Woe to the half-dead wretch, who meets
The glaring of those large blue eyes
Amid the darkness of the streets!

This is from *Lalla Rookh*, and was marked as if with approval by some reader of the London Library.

Childe Harold seems to me inferior to this group of poems (*The Giaour*, *The Bride of Abydos*, *The Corsair*, *Lara*, etc.). Time and time again, to be sure, Byron awakens fading interest by a purple passage, but Byron's purple passages are never good enough to do the work that is expected of them in *Childe Harold*:

Stop! for thy tread is on an Empire's dust

is just what is wanted to revive interest, at that point; but the stanza that follows, on the Battle of Waterloo, seems to me quite false; and quite representative of the falsity in which Byron takes refuge whenever he *tries* to write poetry:

Stop! for thy tread is on an Empire's dust!
An Earthquake's spoil is sepulchred below!
Is the spot mark'd with no colossal bust?
Nor column trophied for triumphal show?
None; but the moral's truth tells simpler so,
As the ground was before, so let it be;—

BYRON

How that red rain hath made the harvest grow!
And is this all the world has gained by thee,
Thou first and last of fields! king-making victory?

It is all the more difficult, in a period which has rather lost the appreciation of the kind of virtues to be found in Byron's poetry, to analyse accurately his faults and vices. Hence we fail to give credit to Byron for the instinctive art by which, in a poem like *Childe Harold*, and still more efficiently in *Beppo* or *Don Juan*, he avoids monotony by a dexterous turn from one subject to another. He has the cardinal virtue of being never dull. But, when we have admitted the existence of forgotten virtues, we still recognize a falsity in most of those passages which were formerly most admired. To what is this falsity due?

Whatever it is, in Byron's poetry, that is 'wrong,' we should be mistaken in calling it rhetoric. Too many things have been collected under that name; and if we are going to think that we have accounted for Byron's verse by calling it 'rhetorical,' then we are bound to avoid using that adjective about Milton and Dryden, about both of whom (in their very different kinds) we seem to be saying something that has meaning, when we speak of their 'rhetoric.' Their failures, when they fail, are of a higher kind than Byron's success, when he succeeds. Each had a strongly individual idiom, and a sense of language; at their worst, they have an interest in the *word*. You can recognize them in the single line, and can say: here is a particular way of using the language. There is no such individuality in the line of Byron. If one looks at the few single lines, from the Waterloo passage in *Childe Harold*, which may pass for 'familiar quotations,' you cannot say that any of them is great poetry:

And all went merry as a marriage bell . . .
On with the dance! let joy be unconfined

Of Byron one can say, as of no other English poet of his eminence, that he added nothing to the language, that he discovered nothing in the sounds, and developed nothing in the meaning, of individual words. I cannot think of any other poet of his distinction who might so easily have been an accomplished foreigner writing English. The ordinary person talks English, but only a few people in every generation can write it; and upon this undeliberate collaboration between a great many people talking a living language and a very few people writing it, the continuance and maintenance of a language depends. Just as an artisan

who can talk English beautifully while about his work or in a public bar, may compose a letter painfully written in a dead language bearing some resemblance to a newspaper leader, and decorated with words like 'maelstrom' and 'pandemonium': so does Byron write a dead or dying language.

This imperceptiveness of Byron to the English word—so that he has to use a great many words before we become aware of him—indicates for practical purposes a defective sensibility. I say 'for practical purposes' because I am concerned with the sensibility in his poetry, not with his private life; for if a writer has not the language in which to express feelings they might as well not exist. We do not even need to compare his account of Waterloo with that of Stendhal to feel the lack of minute particulars; but it is worth remarking that the prose sensibility of Stendhal, being sensibility, has some values of poetry that Byron completely misses. Byron did for the language very much what the leader writers of our journals are doing day by day. I think that this failure is much more important than the platitude of his intermittent philosophizing. Every poet has uttered platitudes, every poet has said things that have been said before. It is not the weakness of the ideas, but the schoolboy command of the language, that makes his lines seem trite and his thought shallow:

Mais que Hugo aussi était dans tout ce peuple. The words of Péguy have kept drifting through my mind while I have been thinking of Byron:

'Non pas vers qui chantent dans la mémoire, mais vers qui dans la mémoire sonnent et retentissent comme une fanfare, vibrants, trépidants, sonnans comme une fanfare, sonnans comme une charge, tambour éternel, et qui batta dans les mémoires françaises longtemps après que les réglementaires tarbours auront cessé de battre au front des régiments.'

But Byron was not 'in *this* people,' either of London or of England, but in his mother's people, and the most stirring stanza of his Waterloo is this:

And wild and high the 'Cameron's gathering' rose!
The war-note of Lochiel, which Albyn's hills
Have heard, and heard, too, have her Saxon foes;—
How in the noon of night that pibroch thrills,
Savage and shrill! But with the breath which fills
Their mountain-pipe, so fill the mountaineers
With the fierce native daring which instils

BYRON

The stirring memory of a thousand years,
And Evan's, Donald's fame rings in each clansman's ears!

All things worked together to make *Don Juan* the greatest of Byron's poems. The stanza that he borrowed from the Italian was admirably suited to enhance his merits and conceal his defects, just as on a horse or in the water he was more at ease than on foot. His ear was imperfect, and capable only of crude effects; and in this easy-going stanza, with its habitually feminine and occasionally triple endings, he seems always to be reminding us that he is not really trying very hard and yet producing something as good or better than that of the solemn poets who take their verse-making more seriously. And Byron really is at his best when he is not trying too hard to be poetic; when he tries to be poetic in a few lines he produces things like the stanza I have already quoted, beginning:

Between two worlds life hovers like a star.

But at a lower intensity he gets a surprising range of effect. His genius for digression, for wandering away from his subject (usually to talk about himself) and suddenly returning to it, is, in *Don Juan*, at the height of its power. The continual banter and mockery, which his stanza and his Italian model serve to keep constantly in his mind, serve as an admirable antacid to the high-falutin which in the earlier romances tends to upset the reader's stomach; and his social satire helps to keep him to the objective and has a sincerity that is at least plausible if not profound. The portrait of himself comes much nearer to honesty than any that appears in his earlier work. This is worth examining in some detail.

Charles Du Bos, in his admirable *Byron et le besoin de la fatalité*, quotes a long passage of self-portraiture from *Lara*. Du Bos deserves full credit for recognizing its importance; and Byron deserves all the credit that Du Bos gives him for having written it. This passage strikes me also as a masterpiece of self-analysis, but of a self that is largely a deliberate fabrication—a fabrication that is only completed in the actual writing of the lines. The reason why Byron understood this self so well, is that it is largely his own invention; and it is only the self that he invented that he understood perfectly. If I am correct, one cannot help feeling pity and horror at the spectacle of a man devoting such gigantic energy and persistence to such a useless and petty purpose: though at the same time we must feel sympathy and humility in reflecting that it

is a vice to which most of us are addicted in a fitful and less persevering way; that is to say, Byron made a vocation out of what for most of us is an irregular weakness, and deserves a certain sad admiration for his degree of success. But in *Don Juan*, we get something much nearer to genuine self-revelation. For Juan, in spite of the brilliant qualities with which Byron invests him—so that he may hold his own among the English aristocracy—is not an heroic figure. There is nothing absurd about his presence of mind and courage during the shipwreck, or about his prowess in the Turkish wars: he exhibits a kind of physical courage and capacity for heroism which we are quite willing to attribute to Byron himself. But in the accounts of his relation with women, he is not made to appear heroic or even dignified; and these impress us as having an ingredient of the genuine as well as of the make-believe.

It is noticeable—and this confirms, I think, the view of Byron held by Mr. Peter Quennell—that in these love-episodes Juan always takes the passive role. Even Haidee, in spite of the innocence and ignorance of that child of nature, appears rather as the seducer than the seduced. This episode is the longest and most carefully elaborate of all the amorous passages, and I think it deserves pretty high marks. It is true that after Juan's earlier initiation by Donna Julia, we are hardly so credulous as to believe in the innocence attributed to him with Haidee; but this should not lead us to dismiss the description as false. The *innocence* of Juan is merely a substitute for the *passivity* of Byron; and if we restore the latter we can recognize in the account some authentic understanding of the human heart, and accept such lines as

Alas! They were so young, so beautiful,
 So lonely, loving, helpless and the hour
 Was that in which the heart is always full,
 And having o'er itself no further power,
 Prompts deeds eternity cannot annul. . . .

The lover of Donna Julia and of Haidee is just the man, we feel, to become subsequently the favourite of Catherine the Great—to introduce whom, one suspects, Byron had prepared himself by his eight months with the Countess of Oxford. And there remains, if not innocence, that strange passivity that has a curious resemblance to innocence.

Between the first and second part of the poem, between Juan's adventures abroad and his adventures in England, there is a noticeable difference. In the first part the satire is incidental; the action is picaresque, and of the best kind. Byron's invention never fails. The ship-

wreck, an episode too well-known to quote, is something quite new and quite successful, even if it be somewhat overdone by the act of cannibalism in which it culminates. The last wild adventure occurs directly after Juan's arrival in England, when he is held up by footpads on the way to London; and here again, I think, in the obituary of the dead highwayman, is something new in English verse:

He from the world had cut off a great man,
 Who in his time had made heroic bustle.
 Who in a row like Tom could lead the van,
 Booze in the ken, or at the spellken hustle?
 Who queer a flat? Who (spite of Bow-street's ban)
 On the high toby-spice so flash the muzzle?
 Who on a lark, with black-eyed Sal (his blowing)
 So prime, so swell, so nutty, and so knowing?

That is first-rate. It is not a bit like Crabbe, but it is rather suggestive of Burns.

The last four cantos are, unless I am greatly mistaken, the most substantial of the poem. To satirize humanity in general requires either a more genial talent than Byron's, such as that of Rabelais, or else a more profoundly tortured one, such as Swift's. But in the latter part of *Don Juan* Byron is concerned with an English scene, in which there was for him nothing romantic left; he is concerned with a restricted field that he had known well, and for the satirizing of which an acute animosity sharpened his powers of observation. His understanding may remain superficial, but it is precise. Quite possibly he undertook something that he would have been unable to carry to a successful conclusion; possibly there was needed, to complete the story of that monstrous house-party, some high spirits, some capacity for laughter, with which Byron was not endowed. He might have found it impossible to deal with that remarkable personage Aurora Raby, the most serious character of his invention, within the frame of his satire. Having invented a character too serious, in a way too real for the world he knew, he might have been compelled to reduce her to the size of one of his ordinary romantic heroines. But Lord Henry and Lady Adeline Amundeville are persons exactly on the level of Byron's capacity for understanding; and they have a reality for which their author has perhaps not received due credit.

What puts the last cantos of *Don Juan* at the head of Byron's works is, I think, that the subject matter gave him at last an adequate object

for a genuine emotion. The emotion is hatred of hypocrisy; and if it was reinforced by more personal and petty feelings, the feelings of the man who as a boy had known the humiliation of shabby lodgings with an eccentric mother, who at fifteen had been clumsy and unattractive and unable to dance with Mary Chaworth, who remained oddly alien among the society that he knew so well—this mixture of the origin of his attitude towards English society only gives it greater intensity. And the hypocrisy of the world that he satirized was at the opposite extreme from his own. Hypocrite, indeed, except in the original sense of the word, is hardly the term for Byron. He was an actor who devoted immense trouble to *becoming* a role that he adopted; his superficiality was something that he created for himself. It is difficult, in considering Byron's poetry, not to be drawn into an analysis of the man: but much more attention has already been devoted to the man than to the poetry, and I prefer, within the limits of such an essay as this, to keep the latter in the foreground. My point is that Byron's satire upon English society, in the latter part of *Don Juan*, is something for which I can find no parallel in English literature. He was right in making the hero of his house-party a Spaniard, for what Byron understands and dislikes about English society is very much what an intelligent foreigner in the same position would understand and dislike.

One cannot leave *Don Juan* without calling attention to another part of it which emphasizes the difference between this poem and any other satire in English: the Dedictory Verses. The Dedication to Southey seems to me one of the most exhilarating pieces of abuse in the language:

Bob Southey! You're a poet—Poet Laureate,
And representative of all the race;
Although 'tis true that you turn'd out a Tory at
Last, yours has lately been a common case;
And now, my Epic Renegade! what are ye at? . . .

kept up without remission to the end of seventeen stanzas. This is not the satire of Dryden, still less of Pope; it is perhaps more like Hall or Marston, but they are bunglers in comparison. This is not indeed English satire at all; it is really a *flyting*, and closer in feeling and intention to the satire of Dunbar:

Lene larbar, loungeour, baith lowsy in lisk and lonye;
Fy! skolderit skyn, thow art both skyre and skrumple;
For he that rostit Lawrance had thy grunye,

BYRON

And he that hid Sanct Johnis ene with ane womple,
And he that dang Sanct Augustine with ane rumple,
Thy fowll front had, and he that Bartilmo flaid;
The gallowis gaipis eftit thy graceles gruntill,
As thow wald for ane haggeis, hungry gled.

To some this parallel may seem questionable, but to me it has brought a keener enjoyment, and I think a juster appreciation of Byron than I had before. I do not pretend that Byron is Villon (nor, for other reasons, does Dunbar or Burns equal the French poet), but I have come to find in him certain qualities, besides his abundance, that are too uncommon in English poetry, as well as the absence of some vices that are too common. And his own vices seem to have twin virtues that closely resemble them. With his charlatanism, he has also an unusual frankness; with his pose, he is also a *poète contumace* in a solemn country; with his humbug and self-deception he has also a reckless raffish honesty; he is at once a vulgar patrician and a dignified toss-pot; with all his bogus diabolism and his vanity of pretending to disreputability, he is genuinely superstitious and disreputable. I am speaking of the qualities and defects visible in his work, and important in estimating his work: not of the private life, with which I am not concerned.

W. W. ROBSON

Byron and Sincerity

BY LOOKING at the relation between diction and movement we may study the evolution of Byron's most truly personal and original poetry, the core of his work. A very early poem like *When we two parted* (1808) already shows the close association, in Byron, between the depth or quality of a poem's sentiment and the individuality of its verse-rhythm. The perpetual slight unexpectedness of the measure, the continuous small uncertainty that the reader-aloud must feel as to where a break or pause is coming, testifies to the genuineness of the poem's impulse. Where its rhythm approaches regularity, as in the second and third stanzas:

The dew of the morning
Sunk chill on my brow—
It felt like the warning
Of what I feel now

a vulgarity in the writing becomes more obvious; and we have a sense of the extreme precariousness, the fragility, of this mode of expression, in what is after all a work of immaturity.

A comparison between this poem and *Ae fond kiss* is instructive. (The comparison is suggested, though not elaborated on, by I. A. Richards in *The Principles of Literary Criticism*.) The four famous lines of the latter poem:

From "Byron as Poet," in *Critical Essays* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1966; © W. W. Robson, 1966), pp. 160-188. Reprinted, slightly revised by the author, by permission of the author, Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., and Harper & Row.

Had we never lov'd sae kindly,
 Had we never lov'd sae blindly,
 Never met and never parted,
 We had ne'er been broken-hearted

—these, as Arnold says, are beyond Byron's reach. But after repeated readings of Burns's poems they stand out oddly from the hubbub of stock emotionalism which surrounds them (the 'dark despairs' and all the rest of it). This contrast, taken with the flaccid, overweight character of the stanza form, suggests an impurity in the poetic impulse; a suggestion which is confirmed (not that confirmation is necessary) by what we know of Burns's attitude in life towards the importunities of 'Nancy.' In Byron's poem, on the other hand, there is no such impurity. It springs from a situation which is felt by the reader as real (whatever the biographical facts may be). And this feeling of reality, together with the immaturity which conditions it, is conveyed in the varying character of the rhythm.

An equal, though different, success is the later lyric *There be none of Beauty's daughters*. Here the constituent of the poem is no more than a gravely conventional compliment, in the Regency manner. The imagery:

And the midnight moon is weaving
 Her bright chain o'er the deep

is of the same quality as Byron's friend Tom Moore's. The distinctiveness is again in the rhythm and tempo. It is not just in the subtle abrogations of regularity:

There be none of Beauty's daughters
 —With a magic like thee;

(Everything is lost, if we make the semantically insignificant change to 'With a magic *like to* thee.') The charm lies most in the way in which, while the phrasing pays the most graceful homage possible to the singing (by announcing that it has made Lord Byron's spirit bow, and lulled to rest that oceanic, tempestuous bosom), at the same time those light but subtle changes of tempo acknowledge with an equal grace the essential slightness of the theme. ('A full *but soft* emotion.') It is in ways like these that Byron's short lyrics at their best may be said to achieve their own kind of decorum, a decorum not deriving from any impersonal convention or established mode. In a piece like

She walks in beauty we have the nearest that this decorum, while remaining quite personal to Byron, comes to a stylization.

. . . And all that's best of dark and bright
Meet in her aspect and her eyes;
Thus mellow'd to that tender light
Which heaven to gaudy day denies.
One shade the more, one ray the less,
Had half impair'd the nameless grace . . .

This last line quotes Pope, and the manner in general is plainly near to one of Pope's manners:

So, when the sun's broad beam has tir'd the sight,
All mild ascends the moon's more sober light;
Serene in virgin modesty she shines,
And unobserved the glaring orb declines.

But this air of graceful conformity to a tradition is rare in Byron's lyrics. They are perfectly complete in themselves; but, as a rule, they excite an interest in the poet over and above our admiration of his skill; we feel them to be parts of a whole which is both greater and different. Reading an exquisite poem of Thomas Campion may make us want to read other poems of Campion; but wider reading, while it increases our respect for the poet by revealing the scope of his art, adds nothing to our appreciation of the poem with which we started. And to appreciate that poem rightly is to realize that there is no point in trying to go behind or beyond it. This is not because Campion is 'minor'; we have the same feeling about that fine lyric of Dryden *Ah, fading joy*. A lyric of Byron, on the other hand, a lyric like *So we'll go no more aroving*, the best one he wrote, differs from *Ah, fading joy* or *Rosecheekt Laura*, not only in gaining in life and meaning from our sense that it is the culmination of a poet's whole work, but in being on the face of it a dramatic utterance: the voice of an individual.

'Sincerity and strength,' was the judgement of Swinburne, endorsed by Arnold; and it brings us again to that personal question, which can never be long postponed, or dodged, in the discussion of Byron. The 'strength,' of course, needs little commentary. An athletic buoyancy is the most noticeable, and often the redeeming, feature of Byron's poetry, tempering our exasperation after a long session with the Poetical Works, some of which are bad, and many of which are not very good. He has the extra zest, the record-breaker's enthusiasm, of the

lame man exulting in his ability to ride and swim. Sometimes, indeed, this immortal velocity of Byron's causes a comic incongruity between his movement and his matter:

Though wit may flash from fluent lips, and mirth distract the
breast,
Through midnight hours that yield no more their former hope
of rest;
'Tis but as ivy-leaves around the ruin'd turret wreath,
All green and wildly fresh without, all worn and grey beneath.

And a poem like the one that begins:

Oh, talk to me not of a name great in story;
The days of our youth are the days of our glory;

offered as a poignant utterance of the ageing Byron, is an exhilarating gallop. The strength of Byron, then, can show itself in uninteresting or undistinguished ways; but it is an indispensable quality of his best poetry: while it prevents his lesser things from being at any rate tame or dull. Even where the strength is consciously measured and restraining itself, as in the sonnet to George IV ('To be the father of the fatherless'), we see its power when we compare it with Shelley's sonnet *England in 1819*.

'Sincerity,' however—that difficult but indispensable concept—is a more complex matter; all readers of Byron know how awkward is its application to him. For the moment, its reference may be limited to the felt identification of the poet with the emotion expressed. Now it is an interesting, and peculiar, characteristic of some of the greatest things that Byron wrote, that their impressiveness derives partly from our feeling that there is *not* this complete identification. I am thinking particularly of poems associated with the Separation Drama. The explicit emotion—or commotion—is expressed powerfully enough. Byron is much more deeply disturbed than in his earlier poems; there is no question of his acting a part, as in the verse-romances; the expression comes from the centre. And yet we register some consciousness of the writer that there are features of the experience which his present state of mind compels him to leave out, but which will reassert themselves later. Faced with these poems of Byron, poems which have a human and poetic character for which I can think of no parallel, we cannot call them insincere; we are forced, therefore, to revise our notion of sincerity. Consider the *Lines on hearing that Lady Byron was ill*, per-

haps the most impressive poem that Byron wrote; since it is not very well known, and I wish to comment on some details, I will quote the whole.

And thou wert sad—yet I was not with thee;
 And thou wert sick, and yet I was not near;
 Methought that joy and health alone could be
 Where I was *not*—and pain and sorrow here!
 And is it thus?—It is as I foretold,
 And shall be more so; for the mind recoils
 Upon itself, and the wreck'd heart lies cold,
 While heaviness collects the shattered spoils.
 It is not in the storm nor in the strife
 We feel benumb'd, and wish to be no more,
 But in the after-silence on the shore,
 When all is lost, except a little life.
 I am too well avenged!—but 'twas my right;
 Whate'er my sins might be, *thou* wert not sent
 To be the Nemesis who should requite—
 Nor did Heaven choose so near an instrument.
 Mercy is for the mercifull!—if thou
 Hast been of such, 'twill be accorded now.
 Thy nights are banish'd from the realms of sleep!—
 Yes! they may flatter thee, but thou shalt feel
 A hollow agony which will not heal,
 For thou art pillow'd on a curse too deep;
 Thou hast sown in my sorrow, and must reap
 The bitter harvest in a woe as real!
 I have had many foes, but none like thee;
 For 'gainst the rest I could myself defend,
 And be avenged, or turn them into friend;
 But thou in safe implacability
 Hadst nought to dread—in thy own weakness shielded,
 And in my love, which hath but too much yielded,
 And spared, for thy sake, some I should not spare;
 And thus upon the world—trust in thy truth,
 And the wild fame of my ungovern'd youth—
 On things that were not, and on things that are—
 Even upon such a basis hast thou built
 A monument, whose cement hath been guilt!
 The moral Clytemnestra of thy lord,
 And hew'd down, with an unsuspected sword,
 Fame, peace, and hope—and all the better life,
 Which, but for this cold treason of thy heart,

Might still have risen from out the grave of strife,
 And found a nobler duty than to part.
 But of thy virtues didst thou make a vice,
 Trafficking with them in a purpose cold,
 For present anger, and for future gold—
 And buying other's grief at any price.
 And thus once enter'd into crooked ways,
 The earthly truth, which was thy proper praise,
 Did not still walk beside thee—but at times,
 And with a breast unknowing its own crimes,
 Deceit, averments incompatible,
 Equivocations, and the thoughts which dwell
 In Janus-spirits—the significant eye
 Which learns to lie with silence—the pretext
 Of prudence, with advantages annex'd—
 The acquiescence in all things which tend,
 No matter how, to the desired end—
 All found a place in thy philosophy.
 The means were worthy, and the end is won—
 I would not do by thee as thou hast done!

Even without knowledge of the personal situation, the *Sitz im Leben*, we recognize this as a poem coming straight out of life; the command of form and expression that makes it a poem being obviously sustained by an impulse to self-justification *in* life. And a proper reading could only be done by a reader who grasped that situation. At the same time, different readings—though they would all have to be dramatic ones—could well be effective. Thus, the substance of the poem *appears* to be the expression of a feeling of vindictiveness, together with a demonstrative grounding and rationalization of that feeling. And so it could be plausibly rendered. It develops dramatically, from an anguished effort of self-justification before the 'moral Clytemnestra' to a concentrated and merciless analysis of her character, of which the impulsion is manifestly Byron-Agamemnon's incredulous resentment. It is this impulsion which gives their remarkable force to the closing lines, where the prose-like precision of the writing only heightens our sense of the agonized animosity which pervades the whole:

Deceit, averments incompatible,
 Equivocations, and the thoughts which dwell
 In Janus-spirits—the significant eye
 Which learns to lie with silence—the pretext
 Of prudence, with advantages annex'd—

BYRON AND SINCERITY

The acquiescence in all things which tend,
No matter how, to the desired end,—
All found a place in thy philosophy.

This animosity is the *apparent* substance of the poem. But in its true character, which the proper dramatic reading could bring out, it is surely not so much an expression of hatred, as an expression of the will to feel hatred. That there is, indeed, no conscious criticism of the self-indulgence, is evident in the tense inflexibility of the accent. And it might be protested that, while we know that the vindictiveness is not the whole of the poem, we have to go outside the poem to justify that reading. However, there are signs in the poem itself of good, restorative feelings which are trying, though not successfully, to sustain themselves against the overmastering waves of destructive emotion. Let us imagine that we read the opening, without knowing anything of the situation behind the poem, or guessing what is coming; certainly it is a remonstrance, but could it not sound like a tender one?—

And thou wert sad—yet I was not with thee;
And thou wert sick, and yet I was not near;
Methought that joy and health alone could be
Where I was *not*—and pain and sorrow here!
And is it thus?—

With 'It is as I foretold' the vindictiveness asserts itself. Yet the generalized reflection that follows, 'It is not in the storm nor in the strife,' etc., again suggests, if not sympathy, at least a recognition of the common humanity of Lady Byron, with a latent sadness that comes to the surface in 'I am too well avenged!' But once again comes the insistence, this time with a significant extra emphasis: 'I am too well avenged!—*but 'twas my right!*' From then on, irritation at the strain of sustaining this implacable attitude of angry righteousness seems to increase the volume and destructiveness of the negative emotions, the indulgence of which is what one's memory chiefly carries away from the poem. And yet, read again with an ear for its true music, does it not convey a Byron who both wants, and does not want, to feel like this? It is a remarkable human document.

As such it prompts us, as Byron's work so insistently does, to biographical conjecture. But it seems to me sufficiently a poem, despite the 'character' terms which analysis of it must require, to be discussed without passing into appraisal of the rights and wrongs of the Separa-

tion Drama. So does another poem of this period, the *Epistle to Augusta*, which makes an interesting contrast: here we have a different note:

The fault was mine; nor do I seek to screen
My errors with defensive paradox;
I have been cunning in mine overthrow,

The careful pilot of my proper woe.
Mine were my faults, and mine be their reward.
My whole life was a contest, since the day
That gave me being, gave me that which marr'd
The gift—a fate, or will, that walk'd astray . . .

That 'fate, or will,' is a relevant comment on the lines on Lady Byron, and 'I have been cunning in mine overthrow,' with its suggestion of insight into the nature of masochistic gratification, also suggests something of what has been kept out of the earlier poem, the keeping of it out being possibly the reason for that curious effect of willed inflexibility noted there. True, we can still hear the Byron of *Childe Harold*:

Kingdoms and empires in my little day
I have outlived, and yet I am not old;
And when I look on this, the petty spray
Of my own years of trouble, which have roll'd
Like a wild bay of breakers, melts away;
Something—I know not what—does still uphold
A spirit of slight patience . . .

But there is a difference; in spite of 'Something, I know not what . . .,' Byron is not offering vagueness as profundity; his uncertainties are frankly uncertainties:

Surely I once beheld a nobler aim.
But all is over—I am one the more
To baffled millions who have gone before.

And correspondingly, his self-knowledge seems deeper and more genuine:

Had I but sooner learnt the crowd to shun,
I had been better than I now can be;

BYRON AND SINCERITY

The passions which have torn me would have slept;
I had not suffered, and *thou* hadst not wept.

. . . I have had the share
Or life which might have fill'd a century,
Before its fourth in time had pass'd me by.

. . . not in vain,
Even for its own sake, do we purchase pain.

And comparing the manner with that of the lines on Lady Byron, as well as *Childe Harold*, we notice another difference; the *Epistle* is unmistakably by the same poet, but unlike them it is not declamation; it is, on the whole, restrained and circumstantial. It might be called Byron's *Tintern Abbey*, the nearest he comes to 'emotion recollected in tranquillity'—his affairs usually allowing him little tranquillity to recollect in. And like *Tintern Abbey* it associates the renewal of strength for living with the emotion of love, towards Nature—the 'Nature' of Romantic poets—and towards a sister for whom he has more than the conventional affection of a brother. The comparison with Wordsworth of course reminds us that the two poets are extremely, almost absurdly, unlike: in spite of such lines as these in the *Epistle*:

Perhaps a kinder clime, or purer air,
(For even to this may change of sould refer,
And with light armour we may learn to bear,)
Have taught me a strange quiet, which was not

The chief companion of a calmer lot.
I feel almost at times as I have felt
In happy childhood; tree, and flowers and brooks,
Which do remember me of where I dwelt
Ere my young mind was sacrificed to books,
Come as of yore upon me . . .

The world is all before me; I but ask
Of Nature that with which she will comply—

. . . Nor shall I conceal
That with all this I still can look around,
And worship Nature with a thought profound.

But, as the last quotation suggests, Byron's 'Nature' is a shade perfunctory, and he has not earned, as Wordsworth has, his right to the

word 'profound.' We feel the 'strange quiet' to be indeed strange, to be but a breathing-space amid storm and stress. The reassurance and re-orientation promised by the Alps is felt even in the poem as merely temporary; *caelum non animus mutat* is as true of Byron's wanderings, as of D. H. Lawrence's.

Compared with any passage of *Childe Harold* or the lines on Lady Byron, the *Epistle* has some variety of tone; but it is still only the expression of one side of Byron's nature; we feel that another tone is wanting, and at one moment it seems to be almost there:

But now I fain would for a time survive,
If but to see what next can well arrive.

Contemplating that rueful humour (*what next?!*) we are reminded at this point that the *Epistle* is written in the stanza of *Don Juan*.

But though neither the *Epistle*, nor the *Lines*, are fully representative of Byron's mature genius, they show a great advance in reality compared with anything he had written earlier; and, though I have criticized this and that point in their composition, I should not like to leave them without recording my opinion that they are the work of a great (if not fully developed) poet. Stylistically, they have one striking feature. The Regency quality, associated in Byron's verse and prose with an air of aristocratic recklessness, has disappeared. An urgent personal pressure has transformed Byron's characteristic way of writing into a style of no particular 'period' flavour, dateless. It is at this time that the emancipation effected by 'Wordsworth's trash' first appears at all decisively in Byron's verse; there is the trace of a changed sensibility here and there in *The Dream*, which also belongs to this period (1816):

And he stood calm and quiet, and he spoke
The fitting vows, but heard not his own words,
And all things reel'd around him; he could see
Not that which was, nor that which should have been—
But the old mansion, and the accustom'd hall,
And the remember'd chambers, and the place,
The day, the hour, the sunshine, and the shade,
All things pertaining to that place and hour,
And her who was destiny—came back
And thrust themselves between him and the light:
What business had they there at such a time?

The last line, with its brusque directness of speech, is Byronic, not Wordsworthian; but Wordsworth certainly counts for something in the general manner.

The Regency quality which is so unlike Wordsworth, the aristocratic recklessness of a poem like *English Bards*, returns to Byron's verse in the serio-comic poems which are by common consent his most solid achievement: *Beppo*, the *Vision of Judgment*, and *Don Juan*. But it appears now in a context which, for all its high spirits and geniality, is charged with that fuller sense of the actual world. Mr. Eliot, making the point that a great poet's forms cannot be repeated, remarks that 'you cannot write satire in the line of Pope or the stanza of Byron.' 'Satire' seems as good a word as any to describe these extravaganzas, but 'the stanza of Byron' needs further commentary; everything that needs to be said about Byron's later poetry can be said in terms of what he does with that 'stanza.' The great technical freedom of his comic poems corresponds to the spirit in which they were written, one which allowed for great variety of moods, whose swift changes and oscillations now for the first time find expression in Byron's verse.

It is usual to account for the manner of *Beppo* and *Don Juan* by referring to Byron's attachment to Italy; first as the English milord enjoying—perhaps not so much as he sometimes claims—his Venetian emancipation from English stuffiness; and then as the *inglese italianato* in the milieu of Teresa Guiccioli, a participator not only in the patriotic conspiracies of Italy, but in Italian domesticity. (See *The Last Attachment*, by Iris Origo.) And these new associations, together with his interest in the comic poetry of the Italian Renaissance, certainly colour the lively and picturesque surface of those poems. But the core of *Don Juan* is still Byron's preoccupation with England, and with himself as he was, and might have been, and might still be, in England. And with this particular preoccupation there goes a general concern for truth and reality, expressed either as an impatient moral and social criticism, or as a literary protest: he uses poetry for the expression of anti-poetic sentiments. What is often in itself gay story-telling, or down-to-earth humour, or sentimental inconsequence, or Romantic bravura, or brusque sarcasm, or just pure fun and high spirits, is underlined and given point by this constant appeal to a standard of truth in life and literature. There is an incidental comparison and contrast here between Byron's development and that of Shelley and Keats. In their later work, in *The Triumph of Life* and the revised *Hyperion*, there are signs that the acceptance of a stricter criterion of reality is

associated with a need for greater technical control in the versification. They turn, not to the comic Italian poets, but to Petrarch and Dante. Now in Byron—though he too wrote his *Prophecy of Dante*, in *terza rima*—a contrasting process occurs. The new development is not so much a technical development, as a disdain of technique in the ordinary sense. But the purpose likewise is to secure the maximum directness and realism of presentation.

However, it must be granted that the reality in which Byron was interested was sometimes of a more mundane order than that which concerned Keats and Shelley. Byron can be preoccupied with the actual at quite a humdrum level. For instance, he had a love of literalness, and a passion for facts; he rebukes Bacon and Voltaire for their historical inaccuracies, which he demonstrates in detail; and he is imaginatively moved when in Venice, not at all by the thought of Shylock or Othello, who are fiction, but only by the history of the Republic. The literal-mindedness can show itself in odd ways, and at surprising moments. 'They mean to *insurrect* here, and are to honour me with a call thereupon,' he broods in his *Journal* of 9 January 1821, 'I shall not fall back; though I don't think them in force or heart sufficient to make much of it.' Now, as often in Byron, the misgivings of practicality are overcome by a calling up of emotional reserves.

But, *onward!*—it is now the time to act, and what signifies *self*, if a single spark of that which would be worthy of the past can be bequeathed unquenchedly to the future? It is not one man, nor a million, but the *spirit* of liberty which must be spread. The waves which dash upon the shore are, one by one, broken, but yet the *ocean* conquers, nevertheless. It overwhelms the Armada, it wears the rock, and, if the *Neptunians* are to be believed, it has not only destroyed, but made a world. In like manner, whatever the sacrifice of individuals, the great cause will gather strength, sweep down what is rugged, or fertilize (for *seaweed* is *manure*) what is cultivable.

This impassioned meditation, on a cosmic theme, into which the personal preoccupation develops, comes from the grand, the European Byron, the great human force in the world, who is well qualified to command that admiration and loyalty of which Santayana speaks. But the point I want to make is that that last touch ('for *seaweed* is *manure*'), in such a context, is equally characteristic, and equally admirable. It is a quality without which we would not have had *Don Juan*.

But of course the truthfulness of *Don Juan* is not so much this literalism, and still less the intenser, higher-order truth to life which preoccupied Keats and Shelley; it is man-of-the-world realism; and as such Byron defends the poem, with suitable frankness, in a letter to Kinnaird.

As to 'Don Juan,' confess, confess—you dog and be candid—that it is the sublime of *that there* sort of writing—it may be bawdy but is it not good English? It may be profligate but is it not *life*, is it not the thing? Could any man have written it who has not lived in the world?—and tooled in a post-chaise?—in a hackney coach?—in a gondola?—against a wall?—in a court carriage?—in a *vis-à-vis*?—on a table?—and under it?

Yet even here, in that proximity of 'life,' 'the thing,' 'lived in the world,' to 'good English,' there is a literary manifesto. And in the general attitude there is a moral intention, which Arnold perceived in Byron, though he did not explicitly refer to *Don Juan*. 'The truth is,' Byron wrote to Murray during the Pope controversy, 'that in these days the grand *primum mobile* of England is *cant*; cant political, cant religious, cant moral; but always *cant*, multiplied through all the varieties of life. It is the fashion . . .' That the fashion does not change so very much, is one reason why *Don Juan* is still lively reading. There are still enough shabby smugnesses at home, and tyrannies abroad, to preserve its astringency and ensure its tonic effect. In this moral attitude, and in the tone of voice in which it is conveyed, Byron reminds us of Burns, with whom indeed he felt an affinity. 'Burns,' he says, comparing him to the Cockney School, 'is often coarse, but never vulgar.' And again: 'Read Burns today. What would he have been, if a patrician? We should have had more polish—less force—just as much verse, but no immortality—a divorce and a duel or two, the which had he survived, as his potations must have been less spirituous, he might have lived as long as Sheridan.'¹ But this last comment also registers Byron's sense of his difference from Burns. For all they have in common, in their man-to-man appeal, their amatory inflammability, their satiric bent, and their invocation of the universal human heart—and also, it may be, a national characteristic which comes out in all these traits—Byron remains the 'patrician,' speaking from the plane of Sheridan, not that of Burns; there is something dignified about his dissipation, even while there is something of *l'homme sensuel moyen* about his dignity.

It is not, then, from his admiration for Burns, nor even from his in-

terest in the Italian poets, that Byron's comic poetry derives its inspiration and sanction; but from the use of resources in Byron himself, which he had not previously exploited in poetry. The Byron of the letters and journals, of the world in which he was worried and was bored, and sneered and gossiped, comes into the verse; to provide the standards by which Wordsworth or Wilberforce, George IV or the Duke of Wellington, are judged. In the *Vision of Judgment* it is the demeanour of Wilkes, besides that of Junius ('I loved my country, and I hated him'), that attracts Byron; while in *Beppo* the viewpoint is that of the amused and amusing cosmopolitan Englishman, observing Venetian sexual *mores*, with their matter-of-factness and good sense. The extension of range appears poetically as that ability to modulate, or to pass from key to key without modulation, which constantly appears in the letters; here, for example, is the conclusion of a letter to Moore (Venice, 19 September 1818):

I wish you good-night, with a Venetian benediction, *Benedetto te, e la terra che farà!* 'May you be blessed, and the earth which you will make!'—is it not pretty? You would think it prettier still, if you had heard it, as I did two hours ago, from the lips of a Venetian girl, with large black eyes, a face like Faustina's, and the figure of a Juno—tall and energetic as a Pythoness, with eyes flashing, and her dark hair streaming in the moonlight—one of those women who may be made anything. I am sure that if I put a poniard into the hand of this one, she would plunge it where I told her—and into *me*, if I offended her. I like this kind of animal, and am sure that I should have preferred Medea to any woman that ever breathed. You may, perhaps, wonder that I don't in that case . . . I could have forgiven the dagger and the bowl,—any thing, but the deliberate desolation piled upon me, when I stood alone upon my heart, with my household gods shivered around me. Do you suppose I have forgotten it? It has comparatively swallowed up in me every other feeling, and I am only a spectator upon earth, till a tenfold opportunity offers. It may come yet. There are more to be blamed than ———, and it is on these that my eyes are fixed unceasingly.

Here the accent of the final sentences strikes us, not as a sudden reversal of feeling, but as the disentangling of a feeling that is already a constituent of the half-humorous, half-Romantic description of the Venetian girl. A finer example is what follows an impassioned defence of Sheridan's character, as a type of the gentleman-adventurer of

genius; when there emerges, in a beautiful way, the general sense of life, at once melancholy and admiring, which gives depth to it.

Were his [Sheridan's] intrigues more notorious than those of all his contemporaries? and is his memory to be blasted, and theirs respected? Don't let yourself be led away by clamour, but compare him with the coalitioner Fox, and the pensioner Burke, as man of principle, and with none in talent, for he beat them all *out* and *out*. Without means, without means, without connexion, without character (which might be false at first, and make him mad afterwards in desperation), he beat them all, in all he ever attempted. But alas, poor human nature! Good-night, or rather, morning. It is four, and the dawn gleams over the Grand Canal, and unshadows the Rialto. I must to bed; up all night—but, as George Philpot says, 'it's life, though, damme it's life!'

It is a way of life that Byron is defending here, and the reference to it is one of the positive criteria of judgement in *Don Juan*. The other, of course, is Byron's Romanticism; the Romantic self which Byron had not so much outgrown, as come to see for one acting-part among others. And the success of *Don Juan* is mainly a matter of Byron's success in effecting a positive relation between the two. The poem is a triumph of personality.

The relation between the Romantic-tragic and the sophisticated-cynical appear in a simple form in the story of Juan's father. This is the conclusion:

It was a trying moment that which found him
 Standing alone beside his desolate hearth,
 Where all his household gods lay shiver'd round him;
 No choice was left his feelings or his pride,
 But death or Doctors' Commons—so he died.

The predominant effect is of the Byronic obsession; Byron is still mowing the aftermath of the Separation Drama. But the effect is of course qualified by the manner of its introduction ('It was a trying moment . . .'), which invites the attitude of ironic detachment; and the astringent terseness of the last couplet is reminiscent of George Crabbe, whose poetry Byron admired. This manner of dealing with his troubles is obvious; but often, especially in the digressive passages, the effect is more complex. Consider the celebrated outburst towards the end of Canto I. Here Byron has been alluding to the adverse reception he expects to get, as a 'dissenting author,' from the *Edinburgh*

and *Quarterly*, and quoting Horace (*Non ego hoc ferrem calida iuventa Consule Planco*) adds that in his 'hot youth' he 'would not have brooked at all this sort of thing,' 'being most ready to return a blow.' Now we see Byron's way of picking up a theme for extensive development; the interest of such passages is partly that we do not know *which* element will be picked up. 'Hot youth,' in its Horatian context, here becomes the theme, and is developed, at first with a little irony:

But now at thirty years my hair is gray—
 (I wonder what it will be like at forty?
 I thought of a peruke the other day),
 My heart is not much greener; and in short, I
 Have squander'd my whole summer while 'twas May,
 And feel no more the spirit to retort; I
 Have spent my life, both interest and principal,
 And deem not, what I deem'd, my soul invincible.

We notice the off-hand rhymes, 'forty,' 'short, I,' 'retort; I.' Then the irony vanishes, in a full-volumed Romanticism; as usual in *Don Juan*, the modulation is signalized by a change in the character of the rhymes, and the general sonority: the voice, though remaining a speaking voice, takes on an underlying singing tone:

No more—no more—Oh! never more on me
 The freshness of the heart can fall like dew,
 Which out of all the lovely things we see
 Extracts emotions beautiful and new;
 Hived in our bosoms like the bag o' the bee.
 Think'st thou the honey with those objects grew?
 Alas! 'twas not in them, but in thy power
 To double even the sweetness of a flower.

It is Byron's equivalent to *Dejection: an Ode*. But the stanza just quoted is followed by a partial return of the common sense, the reasonable, the Augustan, emerging ruefully in a still predominantly Romantic context:

No more—no more—Oh! never more, my heart,
 Canst thou be my sole world, my universe!
 Once all in all, but now a thing apart,
 Thou canst not be my blessing or my curse:
 The illusion's gone for ever, and thou art
 Insensible, I trust, but none the worse,

And in thy stead I've got a deal of judgment,
Though heaven knows how it even found a lodgment.

None the worse: the very unsonorous rhyme of judgment/lodgment is typical of the manner. This returning reasonableness takes on a colour of light irony:

My days of love are over; me no more
The charms of maid, wife, and still less of widow
Can make the fool of which they did before—
In short, I must not lead the life I did do;
The credulous hope of mutual minds is o'er,
The copious use of claret is forbid too;
So, for a good old-gentlemanly vice,
I think I must take up with avarice.

The Horatian regret (*nec spes animi mutua creduli*) appears as a foil to middle-aged matter-of-factness; the stanza running out into flippancy.

The return to the general manner of the poem is effected in an interesting way. There is first a surprise turn: a blast on the trombone of *Childe Harold*:

Ambition was my idol, which was broken
Before the shrines of Sorrow, and of Pleasure;

But this leads into four lines, neither ironic nor Romantic, though serious enough:

And the two last have left me many a token
O'er which reflection may be made at leisure;
Now, like Friar Bacon's brazen head, I've spoken,
'Time is, Time was, Time's past':

and these serve as a bridge passage to the conclusion, or culmination:

. . . a chymic treasure
Is glittering youth, which I have spent betimes—
My heart in passion, and my head on rhymes.

This culmination is Romantic in feeling; but the Romanticism is subtly qualified by the reversion to a completely Augustan manner, a Popean neatness:

. . . glittering youth, which I have spent betimes—
My heart in passion, and my head on rhymes.

The general nature of the effect is obvious, but analysis perhaps serves to bring out the peculiar significance, the dramatic force, of that closing couplet. The Romantic and the Augustan come together with an air of momentary reconciliation; nostalgia for lost youth, for the loss of the emotional spontaneity and power of empathy that belong to youth, is accommodated to a practical acceptance of reality; giving the effect of a resolution (*Aufhebung*) of the two contrasting attitudes on which the passage is built. This dialectic is the life of *Don Juan*.

It may be worth adding that neither the Romanticism, nor the irony, nor their coming from the same poet, is specifically Byronic. There is such a thing as Romantic irony, as in Heine or Musset. What is highly personal to Byron, is the temporary stabilization of conflicting emotions, in a manner which is neither Romantic nor ironical. There is no calculation, of course, in this effect, but in all the wayward progress of the verse there is an internal control which is lacking in other semi-serious poetry, Auden's for example.

In range and variety of emotional tone, as in other respects, *Don Juan* is the antithesis of *The Prelude*. One difficulty in reading the latter is Wordsworth's habit of moving placidly on from dull passages, or passages of fair to middling interest, to inspired passages, without break, transposition, or change of gear. In *Don Juan* Byron has solved for himself and his purposes, as Wordsworth in my opinion did not, the problem of the long poem. His solution is to come forward frankly as an improviser.

I don't know that there may be much ability
Shown in this sort of desultory rhyme;
But there's a conversational facility,
Which may round off an hour upon a time.
Of this I'm sure at least, there's no servility
In mine irregularity of chime,
Which rings what's uppermost of new or hoary,
Just as I feel the *Improvvisatore*.

One need not dwell on the dangers and temptations of the *Improvvisatore* in poetry. Perhaps his most tiresome characteristic is Byron's recurrent self-satisfaction that, without taking any pains, he is writing better poetry than his fellow poets who do. This makes him the vic-

tim of a technique, or lack of technique, which permits him not only to tolerate second-rateness but elaborate it with gusto.

Who holds the balance of the world? Who reign
O'er congress, whether royalist or liberal?
Who rouse the shirtless patriots of Spain?
(That make old Europe's journals squeak and gibber all),
Who keep the world, both old and new, in pain
Or pleasure? Who makes politics run gibber all?
The shade of Buonaparte's noble daring?
Jew Rothschild, and his fellow-Christian, Baring.

The nullity of the writing appropriately accompanies the sentiment of a writer in *Gringoire*. At the other extreme, there are many lapses into the histrionic-profound, from which Byron is never free in any of his work, 'Between two worlds life hovers like a star' and all the rest of it; unimaginable from a poet like Leopardi, beside whom, with all his bookishness, Byron often seems an essentially uneducated spirit.

But the aplomb of the improviser, and the reader's awareness of it, are essential to the art of a poem which Hazlitt described, felicitously, as 'a poem about itself.'

But Adeline was not indifferent: for
(Now for a commonplace!) beneath the snow,
As a volcano holds the lava more
Within—*et caetera*. Shall I go on? No,
I have to hunt down a tired metaphor,
So let the often-used volcano go,
Poor thing! How frequently, by me and others,
It hath been stirred up till its smoke quite smothers!

I'll have another figure in a trice—
What say you to a bottle of champagne?
Frozen into a very vinous ice,
Which leaves few drops of that immortal rain,
Yet in the very centre, past all price,
About a liquid glassful will remain;
And this is stronger than the strongest grape
Could e'er express in its expanded shape.

Byron's improvisation here, after the hit at conventional poetry, his own included, is a justification in practice of figures drawn from 'Art,' rather than 'Nature,' Pope's use of which he defended against Bowles.

But the important point about it is this: the false start shows not only the slip into commonplace which he notices, but an inability which he was perhaps not conscious of, to concentrate his effects; he needs space to be a poet. This of course has bearings on the lack of a distinctive diction, noted earlier. A poet like Keats might have done something with that 'volcano'; Byron could not, but he turns his incapacity into a virtue by rejecting the figure in full view of the reader.

And in fact Byron is perpetually aware, unlike Wordsworth, or the Tennyson of *In Memoriam*, that he has a reader. Then, his sociable tone, his friendship with the reader, is founded on the tacit agreement that he too is a fellow sinner.

They [the sailors] vow to amend their lives, and yet they don't;
Because if drown'd they can't; if spared, they won't.

And Malthus does the thing 'gainst which he writes.

We know what human nature is like, and have not too exalted a conception of it; since we ourselves are the examples that we know most intimately. The air of nonchalant familiarity, which finds its sanction in this fellow-feeling, is not un-Augustan; but it is nearer to Dryden than to Pope. And this is not the only way in which the Regency, as illustrated by Byron, reminds us of the Restoration. But Byron's true analogue in Restoration poetry is not Dryden but Rochester.

Without, or with, offence to friends and foes,
I sketch your world exactly as it goes.

'Without, *or with*' is the touch of recklessness typical of Byron; but it reminds us also of the isolated, anarchic flouting of society which we often find in Rochester, and never in Dryden. There are interesting social and political parallels, as well as personal and poetic ones, between these two rebellious patricians of different epochs; quite apart from their aristocratic anarchism and will to *épater le bourgeois*, there are likeness between the Rochester seen by Bishop Burnet, and the Byron seen by Dr. Kennedy.

But this debonair freedom, and the ease with which Byron manages his transitions and expatiates at whatever length he pleases, and on whatever occasion, about anything which interests him—none of these vivacities convince us that the poet is always enjoying himself. He is not always letting himself go with such satisfaction as he shows in the

flying of Southey. His success in elevating drunken inconsequence to the status of art, is itself as much a product of the unhappy libertine's trying to persuade himself that he is cheerful, as of the half-earnest moralist's ambition to be serious. Even his fun is more the evidence of a gay, than of a cheerful, temperament. It is not hard to see a desperately uncomfortable man in the author of *Don Juan*; the very writing of it is part of the attempt to cheer himself up.

And if I laugh at any mortal thing,
'Tis that I may not weep.

The switches and reversals of mood are not so much the result of a critical check upon his emotion, as a flinching away from it; he hastens to a superficial kind of self-revelation, for fear of a deeper self-betrayal. Sometimes he seems actually frightened by a thought that has arisen in composition. The strange opening of Canto XIV, with the typical change between stanzas vi and vii, is a case in point; and earlier in the poem, after a moving rendering of the madness and death of Haidee, he intervenes with:

But let me change this theme, which grows too sad,
And lay this sheet of sorrows on the shelf;
I don't much like describing people mad,
For fear of seeming rather touch'd myself—

And a similar fear seems to spring up, when he has let himself go in some tender sentiment, of a kind which he will commit to verse, though rarely to prose; but will be quick to abandon, if he thinks he is being caught out, or 'placed' in any single attitude. Indeed, one of his unpleasant traits of character, the caddishness that he showed in the Guiccioli episode (in his letters to friends), seems to be due, not merely to an obvious dislike of ridicule, but to this fear of being 'typed,' thought of as committed to any one part—especially if it is undignified: among the Christian virtues which Mr. Wilson Knight has found in Byron, indifference about one's personal dignity was not included.

But the great self-release Byron gets in *Don Juan* is only possible when he gives up his dignity as a poet. This is interestingly shown in the *ubi sunt* passage in Canto XI. Juan's presence in England leads Byron to moralize, in a gruesome-cum-humorous manner, on 'the life of a young noble.' After an epigrammatic stanza describing this (lxxv)

the thought of the personal application of these lines provokes him to an exercise in the histrionic-profound:

'Where is the world?' cried Young at *eighty*—'Where
The world in which a man was born?' Alas!
Where is the world of *eight* years past? 'Twas *there*—
I look for it—'tis gone, a globe of glass!
Crack'd, shiver'd, vanish'd, scarcely gazed on, ere
A silent change dissolves the glittering mass.

These lines, and there are many like them in *Don Juan*, incite us to a use of Goethe's comment; 'When he reflects, he is a child.' The inability to think is as evident as the jerky, straining motion, and, as the italics betray, Byron is trying to compensate by an imposed emphasis and gesture for his failure to realize his elusive subject. Against his excited gesticulating we may place two lines from a Shakespeare sonnet:

Ah, yet doth beauty, like a dial-hand,
Steal from his figure, and no pace perceived.

In Byron's lines, it is the generality of the concept of Time that defeats him; his poetic gift only appears when he gets down to particulars.

Where is Napoleon the Grand? God knows;
Where little Castlereagh? The devil can tell:
Where Grattan, Curran, Sheridan, all those
Who bound the bar or senate in their spell?
Where is the unhappy Queen, with all her woes?
And where the Daughter, whom the Isles loved well?
Where are those martyr'd saints the Five per Cents?
And where—oh, where the devil are the Rents?

Where's Brummel? Dish'd. Where's Long Pole Wellesley?
Diddled.

Where's Whitbread? Romilly? Where's George the Third?
Where is his will? (That's not so soon unriddled.)
And where is 'Fum' the Fourth, our 'royal bird'?
Gone down, it seems, to Scotland to be fiddled
Unto by Sawney's violin, we have heard:
'Caw me, caw thee'—for six months hath been hatching
This scene of royal itch and loyal scratching.

Where is Lord This? And where my Lady That?
The Honourable Mistresses and Misses?
Some laid aside like an old Opera hat,

Married, unmarried, and remarried (this is
An evolution oft performed of late),
Where are the Dublin shouts and London hisses?
Where are the Grenvilles? Turn'd as usual. Where
My friends the Whigs? Exactly where they were.

The spacious movement ('. . . queens, patriots, kings, And dandies, all are gone on the wind's wings') is broken up into staccato, as with a crash of cymbals. His pen then runs away from him; the freedom of the *ottava rima* is exploited to the full; the incoherence of the stanza on Time returns, but this time incoherence has a dramatic effect—the random snatching at names evocative of grandeur and gossip, heroes and faded dandies, scandal and tragedy, triviality and History, which gives such a hop-skip-and-jump to the movement, only enhances the amusing reversal at the close: the exemption of the Whigs, with their permanence of *vis inertiae*, only adds extra sparkle to the whirligig. Byron has here made a virtue out of his inability to concentrate his thoughts, to realize the idea of Time either in a telling image, or a pregnant abstraction; we are to feel his resilience to the solemn commonplace, in his capacity to organize a movement of so prodigiously long a wave-length; we ride the thought not knowing when the next lift or bump is coming, and emerge exhilarated at the place from which we started.

The whole performance is admirably dramatic. And here we have a word that must, after all, be used of Byron. An agreement between Mr. Wilson Knight and Byron's more conventional biographers, is their common recognition of this quality in his behaviour and life-style. 'And each man in his life plays many parts.' On that question of Byron's sincerity, touched on earlier, the comparison with a dramatic performer throws some light. It is possible, in watching a great actor, to respond simultaneously in two ways: 'How moving!' and 'How well he plays his part!' And we should not feel the actor's greatness less, were we to infer a corresponding duality of consciousness in him. There is no question of insincerity; the performance is successful or unsuccessful, good or bad, but it is not sincere or insincere. Success is a matter of being able to mobilize emotions which one has either had, or can imagine having, without necessarily having them at the moment. This is in a sense a commonplace about Byron. But not all his critics have recognized, as Mr. Wilson Knight clearly has, that there are distinctions to be made here between great acting, attitudinizing, and 'putting on an act.' To judge Byron fairly we have to set aside

what is mere theatricality, or neurosis, the reduplication of an already existent pattern, and recognize what is in effect a *new* emotion, in responding to which we are appreciating a conscious art. Some of Byron's worst attitudinizing occurs when he is least conscious of it; greater consciousness means greater sincerity, but not in the sense of a fuller identification of the poet with the explicit state of feeling; it shows itself rather in an unusual *directness*, which gives an exceptional artistic distinction to the familiar show of strength. (I am thinking here of passages like Canto XIV, stanzas i to xii.)

It is relevant here to mention Byron's interest in the theatre (he was on the management committee of Drury Lane for a time) and to say a word about his plays. When we look at these, a likely expectation is not fulfilled. We shall be surprised, if we turn to *Marino Faliero* or *Sardanapalus* in the desire, or dread, of an emotional debauch. The objection to these plays is quite otherwise; they are too analytic, too schematized; we are offered the analysis of dramatic characters and situations, whose presence is a mere intellectual postulate. The plays none the less have some interest, as a serious and conscious attempt at classical strictness in English drama; they consist in a dramatic rhetoric of ideas belonging to the nineteenth century, but presented in conformity with canons of taste that Corneille might have approved. The intention is worth study: but few will agree with Mr. Wilson Knight that the achievement is that of a great dramatist. The idea, the situations, and the characters are of a piece with the quality of the verse, and the verse is the verse of Byron. True, there is no necessary connexion between dramatic effectiveness and the Elizabethan stage tradition which Byron refused to revive in his own plays. Nor is there an *a priori* objection to the lucid explicitness of his language, and the severe formality of his dramatic structure. The objection refers to their compatibility with Byron's genius as a whole. In order to subdue his matter to his purpose, and find matter which would suit such a purpose, Byron has to leave out nearly everything that makes him interesting. His genius needed, besides a frame of strictness, rationality, and restraint to enclose it, a world of landscape, disorder, and 'hamming' in which to let itself go. We can go from some letters of Byron to the prose speeches of Hamlet without a jar or sense of transition; we may feel that Byron could have been a character in Shakespeare's plays; but he could not have been a character in one of Byron's. The dramatic gift of Byron is not in his plays, but in his letters and journals; and in the dramatic monody of *Don Juan*.

About the narrative and action of *Don Juan*, it is not necessary to go into detail; their attractions are obvious; and the most original feature of Byron's enterprise is well suggested in this quotation from Halévy's Preface to his *History of the English People in 1815*:

To an Englishman, English society is the whole of society, the ideal society. Buckle, in a work celebrated half a century ago, avowedly treated all forms of human civilisation as so many deviations from the true norm of civilisation, the civilisation of Great Britain. Very different is the attitude of the observer from abroad. A great number of characteristics which, being familiar to the natives from birth, have come to form part of their intellectual and moral nature, are for him matter of astonishment—whether of admiration or disapproval is indifferent—and demand from him an explanation. Indeed, of all the nations in Europe, it is perhaps the English whose institutions must, in many respects, be regarded as being, beyond the institutions of other people, paradoxical, 'unique.'

The later cantos of *Don Juan*, and especially the description of the house-party, owe their excellence to Byron's ability to be both inside and outside the people, the institutions, and the social falsities and absurdities, which supply his material. At home in no civilization himself, he responds the more keenly to the comic aspect of people who are at home in theirs. In serious moods, he reveals himself as a *déraciné* who cannot forget 'Society' and his triumphs and disasters in it, but who dreams of another kind of society in which the standards of success or failure are different. That there is an element of daydream in his fondness for the viewpoint of a Tartar chieftain, or a levelling radical, does not mean that he cannot thereby project a lively criticism of the unrealities, fallacies, and inhumanities of the established fact: his knowledge of 'life' and 'the world' projects him from many illusions; and his indulgences in misanthropy do not preclude a real and generous humanity. The anger and horror of the war sections of *Don Juan* owe the power of their expression to their being the correlates of positive feelings; just as the force of the irony, in the frivolous parts of the poem, derives from Byron's unfailing capacity to discriminate between the 'human' values and the 'social' ones. And thus it is that *Don Juan*, which in one aspect is licentious, cynical, antinomian, in another aspect is a most edifying and improving work.

As to the nominal hero of the poem, objections have been made to his general colourlessness, passivity, and silence; but he plays the part

that is allotted to him. He seems in his love-affairs to represent that willingness of Byron to be *used* by women, which is so curious a quality of Byron's own *vie amoureuse*; but he never evinces the reaction against that role, and against the Regency gentleman-amorist in general, which is equally characteristic and significant. So his performance, as a dramatization of Byron's own relations with women, is always simplified and partial. Thus, if we judge that his relationship to Catherine II reflects—as it probably does—Byron's affair with Lady Oxford, we must add at once that the fiction leaves out something essential to the understanding of the life-situation: Byron's need for, or intermittent conviction of his need for, a woman who would be motherly without moralizing. There are two reasons, one technical, and one biographical, for this two-dimensional character of the hero. In so far as the traditional Don Juan is part of the conception, Byron the narrator has taken over his functions; and in so far as he stands for the young Byron, the older man is too remote from him (except in the early cantos) to be willing, or perhaps able, to recapture either his foolishness or his charm. The Byron of *Don Juan* does not give us, as does Stendhal, that re-creation of the follies of youth which is done from within, but which we none the less feel to be always under the eyes of maturity. For Byron, the contemplation of the past is too painful; he has too much a sense of loss, and of tragic waste, to accept it as a condition of the present. *Don Juan* is the work of a mature mind, but not one with an integral vision.

And this is, finally, why we cannot rank it very high among the creative works of literature. 'He did not respect himself, or his art, as much as they deserved'; great art cannot be made out of a boredom with oneself, which is expressed as a boredom with one's subject-matter; and the later cantos of *Don Juan*, which are the finest and most mature parts of the poem, are also, significantly, the parts in which that distaste, that boredom, is becoming a settled attitude.

But 'why then publish?'—There are no rewards,
 Of fame or profit when the world grows weary.
 I ask in turn,—Why do you play at cards?
 Why drink? Why read?—To make some hour less dreary.
 It occupies me to turn back regards
 On what I've seen or ponder'd, sad or cheery;
 And what I write I cast upon the stream,
 To swin or sink—I have had at least my dream.

(XIV, xi)

Byron may get relief from his boredom by writing about it; but this state of mind is incompatible with a sustained creative art. His desire and will to ground Romanticism on reality cannot be satisfied with the attempt to do this in art; he feels that it must be done in life, and it must be done in spite of that nagging fear (exceptionally poignant in one who makes a cult of the spontaneous) of emotional inadequacy. This comes out, not only in the grumbling passages of *Don Juan*, but, with a very pathetic accent, in the very late poem, *On this day I complete my thirty-sixth year*; which was written in Greece.

That reminder of Byron's last service, in the flesh, to the cause of national freedom, induces the suitably sympathetic spirit in which to ask: what is the value of Byron's poetry? what does he leave us with? It is not a question of ranking him among poets; as Byron himself says in his 1813 *Journal*, 'Surely the field of thought is infinite; what does it signify who is before or behind, in a race which has no goal?' But whether we are to revere him as an oracle, or regard him, dispassionately or sympathetically, as a human case, is not a question that can be lightly dismissed. Byron's personal predicament is certainly there:

. . . I am one the more
To baffled millions who have gone before.

And it certainly accounts for many of the weaknesses of his work; the egocentricity, the grandiloquence, the failures in self-knowledge, the lack of balance and perspective, the ensuing monotony. But I have tried to show that even in his morose or destructive moods, even in works that reveal his spiritual malaise most clearly, there is an opposite movement towards restorativeness and health. He is a poet not only in that (to use a convenient vulgarism) he 'gets across' his egoistic passions; he conveys along with them, though doubtless unwittingly, a sense that his vehement indulgence in them is, deep down, against the grain. And our recognition of this ultimate probity is allied to our pleasure in Byron's vitality. Whether one should go further than that, and find in Byron the poet a moral hero, a religious and spiritual force, I am doubtful; is he coherent enough to command that kind or degree of reverence? I should prefer to say that at his best he leaves us with a heightened realization of the value of *personality*, in the sense in which this is distinguished from *character*. But of course the two are not to be finally separated. And to admit this is also a tribute to Byron. His human and poetic sins are many; but, as with some characters in the *Inferno*, we dare not view them with patronage, any

more than we wish to mitigate them with pity. He wrings a paradoxical victory out of defeat.

Poi si rivolse, e parve di coloro
che corrono a Verona il drappo verde
per la campagna; e parve di costoro
Quegli che vince e non colui che perde.²

N O T E S

1. *Journal*, 16 November, 1813.

2. Dante, *Inferno* xv. 121ff.—“Then he turned back, and seemed one of those who race for the green cloth in the field at Verona; and one of those did he seem who wins, not one who loses.” [Editor’s note]

HELEN GARDNER

Don Juan

IT IS A STRIKING EXAMPLE of the neglect of Byron as a poet, in a century which has seen a spate of studies of Byron as a man, that when in 1944 Mr Steffan began to hunt for the holograph manuscripts of *Don Juan*, and the fair copies which Mary Shelley made of the later cantos, there did not exist any census of Byron manuscripts. An entertaining book had even been made out of letters written to him by besotted women seeking his acquaintance; but nobody looking round for a research subject had apparently thought it worth while to make a study of the manuscripts of the most amusing poem ever written. Now, in the year which sees the publication of Professor Marchand's admirable biography, the result of ten years labour, Professors Steffan and Pratt of the University of Texas, after even longer labours, have produced a four-volume edition of *Don Juan*, recording below each stanza as it was finally printed all the manuscript variants, and noting which stanzas were afterthoughts, either scribbled crosswise on the original draft, or added on slips, or sent to Murray with a note for insertion.¹ We can now watch Byron at work on his masterpiece. We can see him fumbling for a beginning, or dashing at one; watch him changing his mind and crossing out, going back to recast a line to get a better rhyme, making a point sharper, or seeing a new point to be made. We can see him reading over what he had written and going off at a tangent to write additional stanzas of comment or reflection or abuse, or of pure virtuosity. We can see him going back over a line to full it out, revising to make a satiric implication more stinging or a joke funnier.

From the *London Magazine*, V (July, 1958), pp. 58-65; © 1958 by William Heinemann. Reprinted by permission of the author and the publisher.

We can see how sometimes the perfect epithet, obvious once found, was only found at the last moment.

The two editors discovered early on that they had each begun work independently on the *Don Juan* manuscripts and decided to make the production of a text which would record all the manuscript variants their joint responsibility. (It is now too late to do more than lament with Dr. Chapman the current misuse of the term *Variorum* for an edition of this kind. It seems to have become an established vulgarism.) This text occupies the second and third volumes. The very difficult problem of how to reproduce Byron's scrawled and heavily corrected and interlined manuscript has been solved extremely well. Any reader who will trouble to master the note on editorial practice can construct for himself what happened in any particular stanza, and enough pages are reproduced for us to compare Byron's drafts with the translation of them into print.

Here is an example of the kind of interest to be found in these two volumes of text and of the light they throw on Byron's habits of composition and on the nature of his gifts as a poet. The first stanza of the famous lyric which the renegade poet sings at Haidée's feast sounds like one of those immediate, inevitable and rhythmically haunting openings which Byron excelled at creating, as noble and natural as the opening phrases of Verdi's arias. In fact it by no means came easily. Byron did not originally intend to write a lyric. He began with two lines for a stanza in *ottava rima*:

The Isles of Greece—the Isles of Greece—where sung
The Lesbian Sappho and the blind old man.

Then I suppose the rhythm of the repeated phrase—"The Isles of Greece"—struck him as a lyric rhythm and he started to recast the lines and produced

The Isles of Greece—The Isles of Greece
Where Lesbian Sappho sung
Where rose the arts of war and peace
Where Delian Phoebus sprung.

This is a banal tune, with its heavy-footed second and fourth lines. He went back and with the line

Where Sappho loved where Sappho sung

he got the lilting rhythm he wanted and expanded his fourth line to match:

Where Delos rose, and Phoebus sprung.

He then went on, having completed his stanza with a firm couplet, to a second stanza, over which he had great difficulty. He had some trouble with his third stanza, less with his fourth, and rather more with his fifth. After this he went straight ahead, with no fumbblings or false starts and with virtually no revision at all, pouring out, now he had got the tune into his head, a succession of heart-stirring stanzas, effortlessly incorporating into their music the great evocative Greek names. It was not until he came to make his fair copy that he hit upon the perfect second line for his first stanza, found his classic epithet for Sappho, and achieved the opening which seems so supremely natural, easy and spontaneous:

The isles of Greece, the isles of Greece!
Where burning Sappho loved and sung. . . .

The two volumes of text are flanked by two others. The fourth is Professor Pratt's and provides a commentary, including, as well as Byron's own notes, those of Moore. The first volume is Professor Steffan's and is really a book on *Don Juan*. I do not always agree with Professor Steffan, and he has a tendency both to over-write, wrenching the language to strange effects, and to repeat himself. But his learning and enthusiasm and the fascination of his material are so great that I feel ungrateful in making any complaint. I wish this edition was not so expensive; but I doubt whether it could have been produced much more cheaply. To anyone who loves Byron and wants to come into contact with Byron writing out of the fullness of his mind it is wonderful value for the money.

In discussing Byron's revision of his poem, Professor Steffan deals first with 'accretion,' that is additions which Byron made at different stages to his first drafts. This is heaviest in the first five cantos. Byron can be seen writing himself in to his poem, creating its character as he went along. By far the greatest number of additional stanzas occur in the first canto of all. Sixty-six of its two hundred and twenty-two stanzas were afterthoughts, some, including Julia's pathetic letter, and the catalogue of rejected heroes (stanzas 2-5), being written as late as a month after the canto had been dispatched to Murray and sent after

it to be inserted in London. After Canto V very little was added to the first drafts, only thirty-two stanzas being added in the whole of the last eleven cantos. Professor Steffan takes this as evidence of Byron's greater enthusiasm for the enterprise at the beginning; but surely the pattern for the whole poem is like the pattern for the 'Isles of Greece' lyric: initial experiment, and then, the manner once found, an absolute assurance in the use of it. The amount of accretion in the first canto shows Byron discovering as he writes that his little bedroom-farce anecdote can serve him as a starting-point for reflection on anything in heaven and earth, and that the manner of *Beppo*, 'a little quietly facetious upon everything,' had not exhausted the potentialities of the *ottava rima* stanza in English, or given scope for all that he had to say about the world and himself. Professor Steffan discusses at length the substance of these accretions, as revealing Byron's obsessive interests, what could be relied on to spark him off.

Contrary to what one would have expected perhaps, there was very little expurgation. What there was seems to have been motivated by artistic rather than prudential reasons. One brilliant couplet was, however, sacrificed to the prudes, when the description of Inez's Sunday school (II. 10) was allowed to end rather tamely with

The great success of Juan's education
Spurr'd her to teach another generation.

The original conclusion was

Their manners mending and their morals curing
She taught them to suppress their vice and urine.

Even more interesting is the evidence the manuscripts furnish of the extent to which Byron worked on separate lines and phrases, particularly of the trouble he took to give his final couplets their punch. The impression given, and Professor Steffan from his study of the actual manuscripts confirms this, is of writing and revision often taking place together, creation and critical evaluation proceeding apace at white-hot speed. The handwriting is a scrawl, and Byron dashes at lines, sometimes beginning with a kind of written stammer, as if he had to write down something while the line or stanza was forming itself in his head. On the other hand a great many revisions were obviously made at a later reading; some do not occur until the fair copy and some were made between fair copy and print. All the same, the over-

DON JUAN

whelming impression is of the rapidity and vehemence of Byron's intelligence, the amount of correction and improvement he made as his pen ran on. There is no suggestion of laboured revision; but the amount of fundamental brain-work that lies behind the 'rattling-on' of *Don Juan* is none the less impressive because it plainly took place at high speed.

It is fascinating to see Byron packing a line with extra point, as when Raucocanti's mere malicious aspersion on the professional competence of the prima donna

And somewhat subject to a cough and cold

is turned into a sarcasm on her temperamental vanity:

And subject, when the house is thin, to cold.

Julia's boast that she has chosen

a Confessor so old

That any other woman it would vex

is heightened by the substitution

so old

And deaf that any other it would vex.

This implies, as Professor Steffan comments, that she has no sins which she is not quite prepared to shout aloud. A hackneyed address to death as 'Old Skeleton' is transformed to the vivid image 'Gaunt Gourmand.' An obvious antithesis becomes a line which the whole world has laughed over, as, for instance, the rather flat

Would sometimes have changed Royalty for Beauty

gives place to the ludicrous image of

In Royalty's Vast Arms he sighed for Beauty.

Many aspects of Byron's temperament are reflected in his revisions: his almost neurotic concern with precision of fact, his desire above all things not to be dull, his interest in psychology, his lively concern with the latest scientific and pseudo-scientific discoveries, and his delight in description, which he thought was his *forte*, but which in fact he rather overdid. The most impressive revisions to my mind are those

which show Byron's critical attitude to language and the keenness of his ear for the tone and rhythm of his lines, his passion to combine the natural with the pointed, to achieve the virtues of a colloquial style without losing the beauties of the rhetorical. Sometimes he will tighten and pack a line; sometimes he will slacken its tempo and lighten it by a parenthesis. Thus the rather over-chatty line

Have lived my Summer out ere it was May

was strengthened by the alteration to 'have squandered my whole summer'; while, on the other hand, the tone of

'Twas Midnight—dark and sombre was the night

was lowered into

'Twas, as the watchmen say, a cloudy Night

and a hint of melodrama was removed. The impression which a mere cursory study of this edition gives of Byron's intellectual vitality and vivacity is overwhelming. At first sight nothing would seem easier to imitate than the manner of *Don Juan*; but the imitations and continuations, which began almost at once, disprove, by their extreme feebleness, the notion that Byron is only a mannerist whose tricks can be copied by anyone who has the mind to. It is the mind of Byron which is beyond imitation. The fullness of his experience of life, his range and ease of reference, his curiosity about all things human, the candour and courage with which he exposes himself as well as his world, his intellectual toughness and temperamental resilience created the manner of *Don Juan* as their appropriate vehicle. The revisions show Byron's effort to give the maximum expressiveness to the truth of substance and force of feeling by which his poem still chiefly lives.

Byron made many different statements at different stages in the poem's composition about what he was trying to do in *Don Juan*. He began by claiming that it was to be in the style of *Beppo*, 'a little quietly facetious upon everything.' Later he said he was writing a 'comedy of the passions,' and, on another occasion, that *Don Juan* was 'a satire on the abuses of the present state of society.' When asked what his plans were, he said that he had no plan, but that he had 'materials,' and protested that the very soul of such poetry was its licence. But soon after this he produced an impressive plan of a tour of Eu-

rope and a study of the manners of society in different countries in the age of the French Revolution. He defended himself against criticism on various grounds, most often by appealing from 'this very moral age' to the standards of the past. One position he never swerved from. He always insisted that his poem was 'true': that it gave a candid and faithful picture of human nature. He did not claim that he was attempting to reform society, or to unmask hypocrisy, or to scourge vice; but that he was writing a 'human' poem which told the truth about man and society.

Strong as the satiric element in *Don Juan* is, and in spite of the power of Byron's bursts of satire, the underlying impulse of the poem is not satiric. It began as a farce and developed into a comedy. Professor Steffan is, I think, wrong to complain, as he does more than once, that Byron often blunts a satiric point by concessions to his victims and that his attack on the 'abuses of the present state of society' is weakened by shifts of feeling. He complains, for instance, that in the great war cantos the force of Byron's attack on the waste and squalor of war is dissipated by his admiration for Suwarrow as a 'great man,' and by his glowing stanzas on the courage of the Tartar Khan and his sons. This is surely a fine example of Byron's strength. His realistic insight into the folly, wickedness and futility of war does not blind him to the facts of human nature. Suwarrow is not only a general who regards human beings as expendable, and thus a target for satire; he is also a man with a gift for leadership, who puts fresh spirit into disheartened troops by unorthodox means and gets what he wants out of them. Suwarrow in his shirt-sleeves drilling his men has the Monty touch. Byron's sympathy and admiration goes out to professional competence in the same way as Chaucer's does. And it is surely rather odd to complain because Suwarrow is momentarily touched by the distress of Juan's girl friends. Byron is not attempting to create a pacifist's Aunt Sally. The war is purposeless and the men who fight in it are the victims of despots, politicians, generals, and dishonest contractors. Byron knows this; but he also knows that human courage, however exploited, abused and misguided, is fine. 'Though a quarrel in the Streets is a thing to be hated,' wrote Keats, 'the energies displayed in it are fine.' The satirist uses all the resources of his art to divert our attention from the fineness; the romantic writer ignores, and persuades us to ignore, the hatefulness of the quarrel. Satire is a major element in *Don Juan*; but so is romance. Neither is pure, and both are contained within a comic vision of man. Suwarrow is allowed his 'greatness,' and not

merely as a concession that makes his inhumanity more shocking. That most romantic couple, Juan and Haidée, spend a good deal of their time together in eating. Juan's splendid declaration to Gulbeyaz of the freedom of the will comes from a Joseph absurdly dressed in women's clothes. His virtue immediately wobbles (like Tom Jones, he cannot bear a woman's tears) and is only saved by Baba's agitated entrance.

The great theme of *Don Juan* is the power of illusion. Byron said that the reason his mistress Teresa disapproved of it was because it was the wish of all women 'to exalt the sentiment of the passions and to keep up the illusion which is their empire. Now *Don Juan* strips off this illusion and laughs at that and most other things.' The root of Byron's attack on the heartless frivolity and cynicism of the ruling classes, and on the idol Legitimacy which they made the shield for their self-interest, is his scepticism. Like the child in the story of the Emperor's new clothes he continues to reiterate that the Emperor is naked. His defence of *Don Juan* as a moral poem was grounded on the salutariness of being undeceived. There are some critics who declare that *Don Juan* is neither moral nor immoral, that it is written to amuse, to shock, to horrify and startle, to make the serious absurd, and to play tricks with our feelings. But it is preposterous to call *Don Juan* an amoral work. Apart from the obvious moral passion in many passages, we are in no doubt as we read that Byron admires courage, generosity, compassion and honesty, and that he dislikes brutality, meanness, and above all self-importance, hypocrisy and priggery. If he does not denounce, he displays with great force the satiety which dogs, as its appropriate nemesis, the life of sensation. He offers no panaceas and does not pretend that men can be saved from themselves by love, sensual or Platonic, by politics, or by patriotism. His resolute refusal to be taken in by cant of all kinds is so far-reaching as to deserve to be called a positive devotion to truth, and *Don Juan* is the most moral of poems in this, at least, that it does not flatter what Swift, along with higher authorities, thought was man's worst vice, his pride and vanity. But, unlike many who hold a low view of human nature, Byron is not driven by it into political reaction. If men are not capable of ruling themselves, they are certainly not to be trusted to rule others. Tyrants themselves are only men, and man's weakness and folly are no arguments for depriving him of his freedom. Byron was a good hater and he hated many hateful things. Although he had no very clear notions of what he was fighting for, he was quite clear as to what he was fighting against. We get no reasoned doctrine of liberty from Byron, as we

do from Milton; we get a very good idea of tyranny and its companion, sycophancy:

But still there is unto a patriot nation
Which loves so well its country and its King,
A subject of sublimest exultation—
Bear it, ye Muses, on your brightest wing!
Howe'er the mighty locust, Desolation,
Strip your green fields, and to your harvests cling,
Gaunt Famine never shall approach the throne—
Though Ireland starve, great George weighs twenty stone.

(Byron first wrote 'forty stone'; but hyperbole had to yield to his passion for exactness. The joke is improved by his moderation.)

Although Byron's vision of man and the world is not very flattering to our self-esteem, or very comforting to our hopes, it is not discouraging. Man may not be a very noble animal, but he has his moments of glory, and life provides pleasures and satisfactions of many kinds. Although most men are fools, by no means all are knaves. The human race has even produced a few heroes, and common men are capable of loyalty and kindness. 'Chequered as is seen our human lot,' it is still better to be alive than dead, better to be young than old, better to be generous than cautious, and better to be compassionate than censorious. For all its bursts of cynicism, savagery and melancholy, there is a fundamental good humour in *Don Juan* which becomes the dominant tone when Byron finally gets his hero to England. Byron should be congenial reading today. There are many and obvious affinities between his age and ours, both exhausted by a great revolution and its aftermath of war; and no writer has been more heartily and consistently 'against the Establishment.' But although Byron can be bitter and astringent he is not sour. His scepticism and irreverence are echoed today; but not his high spirits, and his zest for life. It is rather doubtful if we rise from reading *Don Juan* as wiser men. Wisdom of the highest kind Byron did not attain to, and this prevents him from ranking with the greatest poets. But if we are not wiser we are certainly not sadder from reading *Don Juan*, and there is something for us to learn from the courage and buoyancy with which Byron came to terms with a world as shabby and confused as ours.

N O T E S

1. *Byron's 'Don Juan.'* A Variorum Edition, edited by Truman Guy Stefan and Willis W. Pratt. In four volumes. University of Texas Press, Austin; Nelson and Sons, Edinburgh, 1957.

Don Juan: The English Cantos

AS FAR, at least, as the incomplete poem we possess is concerned, the voyage comes to its climax in the English cantos. And while it is always well in discussing this section to bear in mind that it is not finished and that we do not know how Byron was going to develop the situation, a few generalizations may perhaps be hazarded. In the first place, it is the only section of the poem which actually deals with a social group, and thus is the only episode that would really fit in any proposed plan of treating the characteristic absurdities of the various peoples of Europe.¹ And it is this section in which he seems to be making his most earnest attempt at dramatizing the possibility of "real Epic."² The section is, then, conspicuous not only for its treatment of society and for the number and importance of its evocations of the world of classical epic, but also for the persistence with which it reminds us of the difficulties involved in the notion of reality.

The English cantos, in fact, begin with a consideration of "what is":

When Bishop Berkeley said "there was no matter,"
And proved it—'twas no matter what he said:
They say his system 'tis in vain to batter,
Too subtle for the airiest human head;
And yet who can believe it? I would shatter
Gladly all matters, down to stone or lead,
Or adamant, to find the world a spirit,
And wear my head, denying that I wear it.

From *The Style of "Don Juan"* (Yale University Press, 1960), pp. 111-123. Copyright © 1960 by Yale University Press. Reprinted by permission of the author and the publisher.

What a sublime discovery 'twas to make the
 Universe universal egotism,
 That all's ideal—*all ourselves!*—I'll stake the
 World (be it what you will) that *that's* no schism.
 Oh Doubt!—if thou be'st Doubt, for which some
 take thee,
 But which I doubt extremely—thou sole prism
 Of the Truth's rays, spoil not my draught of spirit!
 Heaven's brandy, though our brain can hardly bear it.

[XI.1-2]

The grasp of metaphysics may not be impressive, but the edginess of the passage is of more than biographical interest. The poet wants to base his epic solidly on reality, and he wants to make a point of the fact. And while he is hardly obliged to outline an ontology, it is well at least to forestall objections of excessive naïveté by indicating an awareness of the complexity of the problem. Furthermore, it is to his interest (as well as to his taste) to undermine any systematic formulation of reality, to set system against system (xiv.1-2), and to exalt the primacy of that immediate experience (what he sometimes calls "fact," or "existence") of which the poet is a peculiarly authoritative spokesman. And finally, the question of reality is important to the poem's social comment.

To restrict ourselves for the moment to this one canto (xi), the introductory stanzas on metaphysics are followed by the episode on Shooter's Hill. Here there is not only an exposure of the seamy side of an ostentatiously free and moral nation, but there is accomplished playing with the notion of heroism (20) and the "great man" (19) much in the manner of Fielding in *Jonathan Wild*. "He from the world had cut off a great man, etc." The difference between a footpad and statesman, it is implied, is largely a matter of social convention (cf. the "sea-solicitor" Lambro). This is followed immediately by an octave on "Groves, so called as being void of trees"—commenting on a characteristic manifestation of lower middle-class gentility, where the charm and elegance is largely a matter of names. Stanzas 35-7 are concerned with lying. Here the attitude is more complex. Politicians "live by lies, yet dare not boldly lie," in contrast to women, who "won't / Or can't do otherwise than lie—but do it / So well, the very Truth seems falsehood to it" (36). Furthermore, a lie is simply "The truth in masquerade," and lying is indispensable to society as at present constituted (37). Then he undertakes to show the reality of social life, the vicis-

situdes of the great in their "earthly Paradise of *Or Molu*" (67-75). The brilliant *ubi sunt* and *carpe diem* stanzas with which the canto ends are concluded with some cynical lines on the "play" of life:

"Life's a poor player,"—then "play out the play,
Ye villains!" and above all keep a sharp eye
Much less on what you do than what you say:
Be hypocritical, be cautious, be
Not what you *seem*, but always what you *see*. [XI.86]

Byron exploits the possibilities of the play or masquerade theme with some skill. In the passage just quoted he is recommending the deliberate adoption of a role if one wants to advance in society. It is important not to "be oneself" ("what you *seem*"), but the self society expects you to be ("what you *see*"). It is the mingled glamour, pathos, and absurdity of this situation that Byron is trying to suggest when he observes:

Sometimes, indeed, like soldiers off parade,
They break their ranks and gladly leave the drill;
But then the roll-call draws them back afraid,
And they must be or seem what they *were*: still
Doubtless it is a brilliant masquerade. [XIV.17]

These Regency aristocrats caught in their social roles call to mind Sartre's waiter "playing at being a waiter." The very typicality or lack of individuality in the list of guests at Norman Abbey is to the point. He interrupts his catalogue deliberately to remark:

Good company's a chess-board—there are kings,
Queens, bishops, knights, rooks, pawns; the
World's a game;
Save that the puppets pull at their own strings,
Methinks gay Punch hath something of the same. [XIII.89]

It is the inhuman, mechanical rigidity and limitation of personality that seems most profoundly to disturb the poet. In terms of the "Ode to a Lady," this is clearly a world in which love is "a bondage or a trade":

But coming young from lands and scenes romantic,
Where lives, not lawsuits, must be risked for Passion,

And Passion's self must have a spice of frantic,
 Into a country where 'tis half a fashion,
 Seemed to him half commercial, half pedantic. [XII.68]

And Byron delights in references to lawsuits and damages.³

But this is too simple to do justice to Byron. The *ubi sunt* and *carpe diem* stanzas toward the end of Canto xi (76-86) remind us that *Don Juan* is a poem that is concerned with time and with the changes that take place in time, with the emphasis falling heavily on the feeling of loss. With this is conjoined one stanza on the "business" of love and marriage in England (89) and three associating the poet's truthfulness and poetic sublimity (87, 89-90):

Thus far, go forth, thou Lay, which I will back
 Against the same given quantity of rhyme,
 For being as much the subject of attack
 As ever yet was any work sublime,
 By those who love to say that white is black.
 So much the better!—I may stand alone,
 But would not change my free thoughts for a throne.

[XI.90]

Now one of the points I am most concerned to make about Byron's method in *Don Juan* is that it is always extremely important to notice what he is associating with what. For Byron achieves some of his finest effects by simple thematic association (such as that of love with war, dealt with in Chapter 3). It may be instructive, therefore, to examine this particular thematic group—time, love, business, and the sublimity of poetic truth.

One reason why it is especially useful to an enjoyment of *Don Juan* at least unconsciously to have made this particular association is that the poet appears to pick it up and elaborate it at the beginning of the next canto. And the beginning of Canto xii marks a turning point of some importance in the development of the poem.

We hear first of all about the speaker's age. He is "middle-aged," and he doesn't like it much:

Too old for Youth,—too young, at thirty-five,
 To herd with boys, or hoard with good threescore,—
 I wonder people should be left alive;
 But since they are, that epoch is a bore:
 Love lingers still, although 'twere late to wive:
 And as for other love, the illusion's o'er;

And Money, that most pure imagination,
Gleams only through the dawn of its creation. [XII.2]

Now that the "illusion" of romantic love is no longer possible (cf. 1.215-16), the only charm that seems to lie ahead is money and the making of money—money being as specifically associated with age and experience as romantic love has been with youth and innocence. And while the poet has been generous in his appreciation of the charms of love, there is clearly something to be said for money, too.

"Love rules the Camp, the Court, the Grove,—for Love
Is Heaven, and Heaven is Love:"—so sings the bard;
Which it were rather difficult to prove
(A thing with poetry in general hard).
Perhaps there may be something in "the Grove,"
At least it rhymes to "Love:" but I'm prepared
To doubt (no less than landlords of their rental)
If "Courts" and "Camps" be quite so sentimental.

But if Love don't, *Cash* does, and Cash alone:
Cash rules the Grove, and fells it too besides;
Without cash, camps were thin, and courts were none;
Without cash, Malthus tells you—"take no brides."
So Cash rules Love the ruler, on his own
High ground, as virgin Cynthia sways the tides. [XII.13-14]

Money is not only in itself an object of excitement and romance (see the analysis of XII.8 in Chapter 5); it "rules Love the ruler." And the tone is no longer, in this respect, quite that of the Ode. This may not be the way the poet would have it if he had a choice. But he is not merely bitter about the situation. And if the tone is not one of simple amusement, neither is it one of savage satire. "Thus it is," says the speaker. Money is not romantic, perhaps—but in a sense it is. Furthermore, if love is an illusion, money in any case is very real. And the converting of its hard unglamorous reality into a thing of curious beauty is of clear relevance to an "epic" poet who is concerned with writing truth. The notion of the rule of love over human affairs is, says the speaker, "poetic," and poetry tells lies. But the poet of the "truthful Muse," engaged in writing a "real Epic," must be rigorously honest without ceasing to be a poet. Hence the point of the tour de force at the beginning of Canto XII, creating for us a vision of that inevitable change in the life of every man from youth to age—and a vision which

presents mutability as more than merely loss. The poet faces the hard facts of experience and finds them not lacking in their own kind of charm.

The point is of clear importance in the working out of the plot. Its elaboration, in fact, seems to be the principal action of the English cantos. For if the world of the English cantos is in some ways analogous to that of the Ode, it is equally clear that a "Lady" is prepared with whom Juan is to become involved in an affair in every sense more perilous than any of his previous adventures. Adeline is explicitly said to be "The fair most fatal Juan ever met" (XIII.12). And that is clearly the point of Byron's insistence on the strength of passion of which apparently cold English ladies are capable (XII.76-7), most notably in the elaborate conceits of the bottle of frozen champagne and the "North-West Passage / Unto the glowing India of the Soul" (XIII.36-8), referring specifically to Adeline. She is, says the poet, like

. . . a bottle of champagne
Frozen into a very vinous ice,
Which leaves few drops of that immortal rain,
Yet in the very centre, past all price,
About a liquid glassful will remain;
And this is stronger than the strongest grape
Could e'er express in its expanded shape. [XIII.37]

The point to be noticed is this: the apparent coldness and the unfavorable social circumstances are seen as contributing factors to the intensity of their love, even as the passion of the Lady of the Ode was refined and made more intense by her own "coldness" and the circumstances which rendered her love a "guilty" one.⁴

The point is worth laboring. Neither the image of ice nor the ideal of restraint has been invested with much grandeur in the course of the poem. We have seen ice in VII.1-2 as a "wasteland" image over which flashes the aurora borealis of poetry. And the image has been used in the English cantos to express some of the less pleasant aspects of English society (XII.25, 41, 72). But the attitude toward restraint has been ambiguous throughout. In the discussion of Juan's education, for example, we are led to suppose that the boy was being excessively held down:

For half his days were passed at church, the other
Between his tutors, confessor, and mother. [I.49]

DON JUAN: THE ENGLISH CANTOS

They tamed him down amongst them: to destroy
His natural spirit not in vain they toiled,
At least it seemed so. [I.50]

The qualifying clause reminds us, however, of the futility of all repression. "Nature," evidently, will out. See the canceled final couplet to II.10.⁵

But even as he criticizes Donna Inez for being overly repressive in bringing up her son, he is also taking her to task for being too lax:

Oh ye! who teach the ingenuous youth of nations,
Holland, France, England, Germany, or Spain,
I pray ye flog them upon all occasions—
It mends their morals, never mind the pain:
The best of mothers and of educations
In Juan's case were but employed in vain,
Since, in a way that's rather of the oddest, he
Became divested of his native modesty.

Had he but been placed at a public school,
In the third form, or even in the fourth,
His daily task had kept his fancy cool,
At least, had he been nurtured in the North;
Spain may prove an exception to the rule,
But then exceptions always prove its worth—
A lad of sixteen causing a divorce
Puzzled his tutors very much, of course.⁶ [II.1-2]

This apparent contradiction serves more than one function. In the first place it brings out the instability of Donna Inez. More important is the suggestion that the alternate severity and laxity tended to cancel each other out (like Fielding's Thwackum and Square), so that when Don Juan goes out into the world he has to deal with it (like Tom Jones) with his own natural resources. The analogy with the sinking ship with "all distinction gone" (II.44) is clear enough. Both the shipwreck and the mode of Juan's education permit the boy to exercise his own natural capacities unhelped (or hindered) by education or by institutional supports. And finally, there is the suggestion of the value in discipline itself.

Already in the third chapter I have commented on the speaker's attitude toward the repression of emotion, observing that he often seems to think of it as a purely physical phenomenon, like steam confined and causing an explosion. This is an essential part of that post of de-

tached objectivity which is one of the most obvious qualities of the *persona* in *Don Juan*. He needs it, of course, to make good his claims of speaking truth. He watches, he describes, he sympathizes; but he is reluctant to judge. It is one of the things about *Don Juan* that makes it seem so curiously French. If he is quite merciless in following out the consequences of passion it is not because he acknowledges religious or philosophical sanctions for morality, but because in his own experience as man of the world he has learned that, like it or not, passion *does* end in disaster. It may be worth it, but the consequences are clear and, apparently, inexorable. It is for this reason that he so emphasizes his own worldliness and sophistication. He needs it to validate a particular kind of statement. What might seem the almost Calvinist morality of *Don Juan* is not really morality at all in the usual sense. At least it claims not to be. It presents itself as the observation of a man who is able to offer impressive evidence of his objectivity and first-hand knowledge. The speaker's insistence on his own sophistication may be compared to that of the Ode, or of Donne's "The Relique."

For, as I have already suggested, there is a notable change of emphasis in the course of *Don Juan*. I have ventured to compare the poem with *Paradise Lost* in that both "epics" are concerned with the loss of innocence. And in the early cantos this loss is lamented with some passion: "No more—no more—Oh! never more on me!" But even as the loss is lamented, the fact of gain is at least asserted:

The illusion's gone for ever, and thou art
 Insensible, I trust, but none the worse,
 And in thy stead I've got a deal of judgment,
 Though Heaven knows how it ever found a lodgment.

[I.215]

And as the poem develops, the emphasis is much less on what has been lost than on what has been gained—on the dangers and opportunities.

Adversity is the first path to Truth:
 He who hath proved War—Storm—or Woman's rage,
 Whether his winters be eighteen or eighty,
 Hath won the experience which is deemed so weighty.

[XII.50]

Experience is now not so much a thing to be lamented as a thing to test oneself against and a means of arriving at something that may be called truth. The fall is "fortunate."

Early in the first canto there is a stanza (part of which I have already quoted in another context) in which the speaker comments on Juan's boy-love for Julia:

Silent and pensive, idle, restless, slow,
 His home deserted for the lonely wood,
 Tormented with a wound he could not know,
 His, like all deep grief, plunged in solitude:
 I'm fond myself of solitude or so,
 But then, I beg it may be understood,
 By solitude I mean a Sultan's (not
 A Hermit's), with a haram for a grot. [I.87]

I dare say this is usually taken as simply another example of Byronic digression (or of showing off). It is, in fact, highly relevant. The point of the stanza, and a point that it makes very well, is the enormous gap between the speaker and the protagonist; for both taken together form the third great unifying device of the poem (along with the myth of the Fall and the theory of the styles), and the relations between them are central to an understanding of *Don Juan*. At the beginning of the poem, as the quoted stanza dramatizes, there is a great gulf between them. On the one hand we have the gauche adolescent suffering awkwardly through his first affair. Looking down on him affectionately from Olympian heights is the worldly speaker—who calls attention to his worldliness at this point for very important reasons. One way of defining the action of *Don Juan* would be to say that it consists of a process of gradually narrowing the gap between speaker and protagonist. For if Juan falls from innocence, in the course of the poem he rises to the level of the speaker. The gain is not unequivocal and the process is far from complete when the poem ends. But it is impossible not to feel that the English cantos mark a clear turning point in the development of the poem. By the end the categories of innocence and experience have become largely irrelevant. The very iciness of the world has become a source of potential charm.

All of which, I hope, may suggest that it is very easy to limit too narrowly the scope of *Don Juan*. I am unable to persuade myself that in it Byron is merely "giggling and making giggle," exposing cant, or, especially, writing a treatise on appearance and reality (three popular and representative schools of thought). From this point of view the problem with regard to *Don Juan* is in many ways strongly suggestive

of problems raised by *Don Quixote*—and it may have been an implicit awareness of some of this that led Byron to compose his stanzas on the “real Epic.” In the course of its long history *Don Quixote* has suffered from two radical interpretations—one seeing it as a farce-satire and the other as a kind of exercise in metaphysics. I think that of the two serious distortions the first is far truer to Cervantes. It is important to perceive, as Erich Auerbach has pointed out, that the whole tone and temper of *Don Quixote* forbids incursions into the ontologically problematic.⁷ It is simply untrue that one is aware of metaphysical depths opening before one, or that in the shuffling of “levels of reality” in Part II either Cervantes or the reader is ever for a moment uncertain as to “where” reality actually “is.” The point of view may be, in a way, naïve, but in other and more interesting ways it is very refined indeed. And if Cervantes is not Calderon, *Don Juan* is not *The Tempest*. And the point of view of Byron’s poem is susceptible of the same charge of naïveté (a charge which one can endure in the company of Cervantes). This is not to say that either *Don Quixote* or *Don Juan* is, as a vision, simple. It is rather that in both Byron and Cervantes the complexity is in the quality of the acquiescence in a world which is, for the most part, simply given. It is because *Don Juan* is, in the sense this study has been an attempt to define, an act of acquiescence in that real world that it can claim to be, like *Don Quixote*, a “real Epic.”⁸

NOTES

1. See the letter to Murray, Feb. 16, 1821 (*The Works of Lord Byron, Letters and Journals*, ed. Rowland E. Prothero, 6 vols., London, 1898–1901; V, 242).

2. There is some reason to suspect that the poet is setting up the situation in epic terms. After commenting on the something undefined that Lord Henry lacked (Byron displays an almost Jamelean fondness for the indefinable in these English cantos), the poet makes a striking allusion to the action of the *Iliad*:

Still there was something wanting, as I’ve said—
That undefinable “*Je ne sçais quoi*,”
Which, for what I know, may of yore have led
To Homer’s *Iliad*, since it drew to Troy
The Greek Eve, Helen, from the Spartan’s bed;

Though on the whole, no doubt, the Dardan boy
Was much inferior to King Menelaus:—
But thus it is some women will betray us. [xiv.72]

I am strongly of the opinion that Byron had the progress of the episode worked out in his own mind, and it seems at least possible that he was preparing to draw on the epic tradition rather more specifically than in the earlier cantos. He may have been amusing himself with the idea of an *Iliad* of which Paris is the hero. And evidently he would have continued to make use of the metaphor of the Fall ("The Greek Eve, Helen").

3. For example, xi.89; xii.65, 68.

4. This point has been skillfully developed by Ernest J. Lovell, Jr., in his essay "Irony and Image in Byron's *Don Juan*," in Thorpe, Baker, and Weaver, eds., *The Major English Romantic Poets*, p. 139.

5. Their manners mending, and their morals curing,
She taught them to suppress their vice—and urine.

6. Cf. l.25:

A little curly-headed, good-for-nothing,
And mischief-making monkey from his birth;
His parents ne'er agreed except in doting
Upon the most unquiet imp on earth;
Instead of quarrelling, had they been both in
Their senses, they'd have sent young master forth
To school, or had him soundly whipped at home,
To teach him manners for the time to come.

7. Erich Auerbach, "The Enchanted Dulcinea," *Mimesis. The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton Univ. Press, 1953), pp. 334-58, esp. 351 ff.

8. Notice that, just at the moment when the issue becomes thematically crucial (after the disastrous end of the affair with Haidée), Byron gives us extended depictions of reaction to adversity in the narrative of the buffo (iv.81-9) and the description of the captives (v.7-9), and in the speeches of Johnson (v.13-25).

Shelley, Dryden, and Mr. Eliot

FEW poets have suffered more than Shelley from the modern dislike of the Romantics. It is natural that this should be so. His poetry is, to an unusual degree, entangled in political thought, and in a kind of political thought now generally unpopular. His belief in the natural perfectibility of man justly strikes the Christian reader as foolishness; while, on the other hand, the sort of perfection he has in view is too ideal for dialectical materialists. His writings are too generous for our cynics; his life is too loose for our 'humanist' censors. Almost every recent movement of thought in one way or another serves to discredit him. From some points of view, this reaction cannot be regarded as wholly unfortunate. There is much in Shelley's poetry that has been praised to excess; much even that deserves no praise at all. In his metre, with all its sweetness, there is much ignoble fluidity, much of mere jingle. His use of language is such that he seldom attains for long to the highest qualities of distinction, and often sinks to a facility and commonplace almost Byronic. He is not a *safe* poet; you cannot open his works to refute one of his enemies with any sense of confidence. But reaction must not be allowed to carry us too far; and when Mr. Eliot offers up Shelley as a sacrifice to the fame of Dryden it is time to call a halt. To be sure, Mr. Eliot has his own purpose in that comparison: he is combating the view of the last century that Shelley must necessarily be a greater poet than Dryden because his subjects are more obviously poetical—because the one writes lyrics and the other satire, because one is in the coffee-house and the other in the clouds.¹ But we must not fall over, like Luther's drunk man, one the other side of the horse. Those who prefer Shelley

From *Rehabilitations and Other Essays* (Oxford University Press, 1939), pp. 3–34. Reprinted by permission of Curtis Brown Ltd. London on behalf of the Executors of C. S. Lewis.

to Dryden need not do so on the grounds which Mr. Eliot has envisaged; and to prove this I will now maintain that Shelley is to be regarded, on grounds which Mr. Eliot himself will allow, as a more masterly, a more sufficient, and indeed a more *classical* poet than Dryden.

The days are, or ought to be, long past in which any well-informed critic could take the couplet poets of our 'Augustan' school at their own valuation as 'classical' writers. This would be quite as grave an error as the romantic criticism which denied them to be men of genius. They are neither bad poets nor classical poets. Their merits are great, but neither their merits nor their limitations are those of ancient literature or of that modern literature which is truly classical. It would be hard to find any excellence in writing less classical than wit; yet it is in wit that these poets admittedly excel. The very forms in which the greatest and most characteristic of classical poetry is cast—the epic and the tragedy—are the forms which they attempt with least success. Their favourite form is Satire, a form not invented by the Greeks, and even in Roman hands not very like *MacFlecknoe* or the *Dunciad*. But it is needless to labour the point. To any one who still thinks Pope a classical poet we can only say 'Open your Sophocles, your Virgil, your Racine, your Milton'; and if that experiment does not convince him, we may safely dismiss him for a blockhead.

Of the school in general, then, we may say that it is a good, unclassical school. But when we turn to Dryden, we must, I think, say more than this. We must admit that we have here a great, flawed poet, in whom the flaws, besides being characteristically unclassical, are scarcely forgivable even by the most romantic or revolutionary standards.

I have said 'a great, flawed poet.' Of the greatness I wish to make no question; and it is a greatness to which the name of *genius* is peculiarly applicable. The most abiding impression which Dryden makes upon us is that of exuberant power. He is what Middle English critics would have called 'boisteous.' He excels in beginnings. 'A milk white hind immortal and unchanged'—'In pious times ere priestcraft did begin'—there is no fumbling at the exordium. He leaps into his first paragraph as an athlete leaps into the hundred yards' track, and before the fascination of his ringing couplets gives us leisure to take breath we have been carried into the heart of his matter. The famous 'magnanimity' of his satire is another aspect of this same quality of power. His strength is so great that he never needs—or never gives us the impression of needing—to use it all. He is justly praised by Mr. Eliot for 'what he has made of his material,' for his 'ability to make the small into the great, the

prosaic into the poetic':² not that the value of a literary result is in a direct ratio to its difficulty—a theory with absurd consequences—but that the sheer strength of the poet is more easily judged when it is thus isolated. Of this transforming power I know no better example than the résumé of the political situation which opens *Absalom and Achitophel*. Not only is the prosaic made poetical, but the obscure and complicated is made clear and simple. A child can hardly fail to understand the state of Israel as Dryden describes it; and yet surprisingly little of that situation, as Dryden saw it, has been omitted. If anything is misrepresented, the misrepresentation is deliberate.

Mr. Eliot himself selects, to illustrate this transforming power, a passage from *Alexander's Feast* and another from *Cymon and Iphigenia*. The first is that in which the tipsy Alexander 'Fought all his battles o'er again; And thrice he routed all his foes, and thrice he slew the slain.' Certainly, if the thing was to be done at all, this is the way to do it. The sudden irruption of the country-dancing fourteenner among the nobler, if never very subtle, rhythms of the ode, most happily expresses the transition from heroics to a tavern scene. Dryden has brought off his effect—and it is an effect which will be dear to all who hate the heroic and cannot see any civil or religious ceremony without wishing that some one may slip. For a critic like Mr. Eliot, however, the question must surely be not only whether a given effect has been attained, but also whether, and why, it ought to have been attempted. Certain classicists would resent the intrusion of the comic into the greater ode at all, as an offence against decorum. I am sure that Mr. Eliot remembers, and almost sure he approves, the delicious reproaches levelled against Racine by French critics for venturing within the remotest hailing distance of comedy in certain scenes of *Andromaque*; and the greater ode is as lofty a form as tragedy. But even if we allow the comic note, can we excuse comedy of quite this hackneyed and heavy-handed type? That Alexander in his cups should resemble exactly the first drunken braggart whom you may meet in a railway refreshment room, appears to Mr. Eliot to add 'a delicate flavour.'³ But what is there delicate about it? Indelicacy, in the sense of grossness and crudity of apprehension, ἀγροικία, is surely the very essence of it. It does not seem to have crossed Dryden's mind that when Alexander got drunk he may have behaved like a drunk gentleman or a drunk scholar and not like an 'old soldier.' No: this is not a subtle or delicate joke. If it is to be defended at all, it must be defended as a 'good plain joke.' As such, Mr. Eliot apparently likes it, and I do not: and this is of very little conse-

quence. What is important is that the passage raises in our minds a rather disturbing doubt about Dryden's poetical purity of intention. The joke may be good or bad in itself. Let us suppose that it is good;—the question remains whether even a good joke, of this tavern type, really contributes to the total effect of the ode. Does Dryden really care whether it contributes or not? Is he, in fine, a man ready, for every ray of accidental beauty that may come in his way, to sacrifice the integrity of his work—a dabbler in 'good passages'—a man who can produce good poetry but not good poems?

As regards *Alexander's Feast* I am content to leave the question open: when once it has been raised we shall have no difficulty in answering it for the rest of Dryden's more considerable works. What do we enjoy in *Absalom and Achitophel*? Undoubtedly, the incidental merits. Of the poem taken as a whole, as a ποίημα, Johnson has said the last word.

'There is an unpleasing disproportion between the beginning and the end. We are alarmed by a faction formed of many sects, various in their principles, but agreeing in their purpose of mischief, formidable for their numbers, and strong by their supports; while the King's friends are few and weak. The chiefs on either part are set forth to view: but when expectation is at the height, the King makes a speech, and

Henceforth a series of new times began.'

No doubt, the very nature of the case compelled Dryden to this fault; but that excuses the man without mending the poem. I do not argue *why* the work is botched, but *that* it is. It is even part of my case that the defect in *Absalom* was unavoidable. It is a radical defect, substantial with Dryden's original conception. It is no mere accident. The work is not merely maimed, it is diseased at the heart. Like many human invalids, it is not lacking in charms and happy moments; but classicists like Mr. Eliot (and myself) should not accept any amount of littered poetry as a poem. If we turn to *The Hind and the Panther* we find the same irredeemable defect in an aggravated form. Of course it is full of 'good things'; but of the plan itself, the nerve and structure of the poem, what are we to say if not that the very design of conducting in verse a theological controversy allegorized as a beast fable suggests in the author a state of mind bordering on aesthetic insanity? If the poet had succeeded it would indeed provide a noble example of the transforming power which Mr. Eliot claims for him. But he has not. *The Hind and the Panther* does not exist, as *Phèdre* or *Persuasion* or *The Alchemist* exist. It is not a poem: it is simply a name which we give for convenience to

a number of pieces of good description, vigorous satire, and 'popular' controversy, which have all been yoked together by external violence.

It may be objected that I am selecting poems merely occasional, specimens at least of 'applied' poetry, which cannot fairly be judged by the highest standards. But this is dangerous argument for the defenders of Dryden. The two poems I have quoted are among his most considerable works: they contain much of his noblest, and much of his most piquant, poetry. If these have to be thrown to the wolves as mere applied poetry for which special indulgence is sued, it will be hard, on what remains, to support the plea that Dryden is a poet comparable to Shelley. But I pass over this difficulty. Let us turn to work more purely 'poetical,' and specially to the *Fables* which no one asked him to write. Here, if anywhere, we may hope to find the real 'maker' at last instead of the mere fountain of brilliant 'passages.' Here, perhaps, Dryden will become the master, not the slave, of inspiration.

It falls out very happily that Mr. Eliot should have chosen from one of these fables a passage in illustration of the 'transforming power.' It is the satire on the militia in *Cymon and Iphigenia*.

The country rings around with loud alarms,
And raw in fields the rude militia swarms, &c.

Of this, Mr. Eliot observes 'the comic is the material, the result is poetry.'⁴ Yes, but comic poetry. The passage, if not so lustily comic as the picture of Alexander's tipsy valour, is a humorous passage; and I do not know why it shows more power to make comic poetry of comic material than to make idyllic poetry of idyllic material. Yet it shows power enough, and I will not press the point; but I cannot help wondering that Mr. Eliot should think it worth while to quote this amusing description (a 'beauty' surely not very recondite), and yet not worth while to tell us why it should be in *Cymon and Iphigenia* at all. To what artistic end, precisely, is this satire on militias inserted in a romantic fable? I am afraid it is there only because Dryden wanted to write it. Doubtless, the fault is here much more venial than in *Alexander's Feast*. The joke itself is less hackneyed, and the lower tone of the fable admits a laxer kind of relevance than the ode. Perhaps, justified as an 'episode' the lines are excusable: and if, in this place, Dryden 'will have his joke,' have it he shall, for me. But there is worse behind. In *Sigismonda and Guiscardo* Dryden reveals so much of himself that I question whether any one who has read it with attention can fail to see, once and for all,

the *alte terminus haerens* which divides Dryden from the class of great poets. Here he sets out to tell a tragic and 'heroic' story. It is not a story of the highest order. It suffers from that overstrain and tendency to falsetto which is the infallible mark of the prosaic mind desperately determined to be 'poetical.' You could not make an *Oedipus* or a *Lear* out of it; you might make a *Cid*. But it is, at least, a story worth telling. And now mark what Dryden does with it. He does not intend to forgo a single thrill of the tragic ending. He intends to purge our emotions. We are to see the heroine 'devoutly glue' her lips to the heart of her murdered husband, and our respect is to be demanded for her 'Mute solemn sorrow without female noise.' That is the note on which the poem is to end. And yet, with such an end in view, this old poet goes out of his way to insert at the beginning of his story a ribald picture of his heroine as the lascivious widow of conventional comedy. I will not quote the pitiful lines in which Dryden winks and titters to his readers over these time-honoured salacities. The reader may turn to the passage for himself. And when he has read on to the bitter end of it, to that couplet where even Dryden's skill in language deserts him and we sink to the scribbled meanness of

On either side the kisses flew so thick
That neither she nor he had breath to speak,

then let him remind himself that all this is the beginning of a tragic story, and that Dryden will presently try to make sublime this same woman whom he is here turning into a Widow Wadman. For such sin against the essential principles of all poetry whatever, no excuse can be made. It cannot be accident. Dryden is the most conscious of writers: he knows well what he is doing. He destroys, and is content to destroy, the kind of poem he sat down to write, if only he can win in return one guffaw from the youngest and most graceless of his audience. There is in this a poetic blasphemy, an arrogant contempt for his own art, which cannot, I think, be paralleled in any other great writer.

It would show a serious misunderstanding if Dryden's partisans pleaded at this point that I was enslaved to some Victorian canon of solemnity as the essence of poetry and judging Dryden by an alien standard. I have no quarrel with comic or cynical or even ribald poetry. I have no quarrel with Wycherley, I admire Congreve, I delight in Prior and still more in *Don Juan*. I delight in Dryden himself when he is content to talk bawdy in season and consider 'Sylvia the fair in the bloom

of fifteen' a very pretty piece. But in these fables—as also in the heroic tragedies which are similarly blemished—it is Dryden, not I, who has chosen that the heroic should be trumps, and has lost the game by rules of his own choosing. It was Dryden, not I, who decided to write *Annus Mirabilis* as a serious and lofty historical poem on what he regarded as the 'successes of a most just and necessary war.' If, after that decision, he describes the enemy as

Vast bulks which little souls but ill supply,

then we have every right to tell that a nation of reasonable men, not to say men of courage and honour, are very ill-celebrated by the insinuation that their enemies are lubbers. This kind of thing runs through all Dryden's attempts at the graver and more enthusiastic kinds of poetry, and it must be remembered that such attempts make up a large part of his work. The sin is so flagrant that I cannot understand how so cultivated a critic as Mr. Eliot has failed to see the truth; which truth had now better be stated quite frankly. Dryden fails to be a satisfactory poet because being rather a boor, a gross, vulgar, provincial, misunderstanding mind, he yet constantly attempts those kinds of poetry which demand the *cuor gentil*. Like so many men of that age he is deeply influenced by the genuinely aristocratic and heroic poetry of France. He admires the world of the French tragedians—that exalted tableland where rhetoric and honour grow naturally out of the life lived and the culture inherited. We in England had had an aristocratic tradition of our own, to be sure; a tradition at once more sober and more tenderly romantic than the French, obeying a code of honour less dissociated from piety. The Duke and Duchess of Newcastle were perhaps its last exponents. But Dryden seems to know nothing of it. He and his audiences look to Versailles, and feel for it that pathetic yet unprofitable yearning which vulgarity so often feels for unattainable graces. But the yearning does not teach them the secret. Where their model was brilliant they are flashy; where the *Cid* was brave, Almansor swaggers; refinements of amorous casuistry out of the heroic romances are aped by the loves of grooms and chambermaids. One is reminded of a modern oriental, who may have the blood of old paynim knight-hoods in him, but who prefers to dress himself up as a cheap imitation of a European gentleman.

The worst thing about such challenging praise as Mr. Eliot offers Dryden—praise, I believe, with which Dryden would be seriously em-

barrassed—is that it forces the rest of us to remember Dryden's faults. I have dealt with them, as I see them, plainly, not maliciously. The man is irremediably ignorant of that world he chooses so often to write about. When he confines himself to satire, he is at home; but even here, the fatal lack of architectonic power seldom allows him to make a satisfactory poem. That is the case against Dryden. It would have been pleasanter to state the case for him—to analyse, in order to praise, the masculine vigour of his English, the fine breezy, sunshiny weather of the man's mind at its best—his poetical health; the sweetness (unsurpassed in its own way) of nearly all his versification. But we cannot allow him to be used, and so used, as a stick to beat Shelley.

I have now to show that Shelley, with all his faults of execution, is a poet who must rank higher than Dryden with any critic who claims to be classical; that he is superior to Dryden by the greatness of his subjects and his moral elevation (which are merits by classical standards), and also by the unity of his actions, his architectonic power, and his general observance of *decorum* in the Renaissance sense of the word; that is, his disciplined production not just of poetry but of the poetry in each case proper to the theme and the species of composition. But it is hardly possible in the present age to approach these questions without first removing some popular prejudices.

In the first place there is the prejudice which leads many people to mutter the word 'Godwin' as soon as Shelley is mentioned. They are quite sure that Godwin wrote a very silly book; they are quite sure that the philosophic content of much Shelleyan poetry is Godwinian; and they conclude that the poetry must be silly too. Their first premiss I cannot discuss, since a regrettable gap in my education has left me still the only critic in England who has not that familiar knowledge of *Political Justice* which alone can justify confident adverse criticism. But the second I can.⁵ It is quite clear to any reader of general education—it must be clear, for example, to Mr. Eliot—that the influence of Dante and Plato is at least as dominant in Shelley's thought as that of Godwin—unless, indeed, Godwin shared the opinions of Dante and Plato, in which case Godwin cannot have been so very silly. Thus, I do not know what Godwin says about free love; but I see that the passage in *Epipsychidion* beginning

True love in this differs from gold and clay

may well derive from *Purgatorio* xv. 49, and thus ultimately from Aristotle's *Ethics* 1169 A. I do not myself agree with Shelley's application of the doctrine to sexual promiscuity; but then Plato, and many communists, would, and neither Shelley nor Godwin need be made the scapegoat. Thus again, in *Prometheus Unbound* I see that the main theme—the myth of a universal rebirth, a restoration of all things—is one which may occur in any age and which falls naturally into place beside Isaiah or the Fourth Eclogue, and that to pin it down to Godwin is a provincialism. Something it may owe to Godwin; but its debts to Aeschylus and, as Mr. Tillyard has shown, to Plato's *Politicus* are at least equally interesting. If Shelley were an ignoramus who had read no book but *Political Justice*, or a dullard who could invent nothing, we might be driven to suppose that his Asia was merely a personification of Godwinian benevolence; but when we know that he had read of divine love and beauty in Plato and remember that he wrote the *Hymn to Intellectual Beauty*, the identification becomes merely perverse. And finally, whatever Godwin may really have said, one of the chief tenets attributed to him is explicitly rejected at the end of Act III. Let us hear no more of Godwin.⁶

Another prejudice is harder to combat because it is ill-defined. It usually expresses itself by the damning epithet 'adolescent'; it began with Arnold's phrase about the 'ineffectual angel.' Shelley is supposed to be not merely *seely* in the Elizabethan sense, but *silly* in the modern sense; to believe ludicrously well of the human heart in general, and crudely ill of a few tyrants; to be, in a word, insufficiently disillusioned. Before removing this misunderstanding, I must point out that if it were granted it would not place him below Dryden. Dryden is equally ignorant of the world, though in the opposite direction, as his sorry joke about Alexander would be sufficient to show. Whenever he attempts to be lofty he betrays himself. There are senile and vulgar illusions no less than illusions adolescent and heroic; and of the two, I see no reason for preferring the former. If I must, in either event, be blindfold, why should I choose to have my eyes bandaged with stinking clouts rather than with cloth of gold? The fashion indeed is all for the stinking clouts, and it is easy to see why. Men (and, still more, boys) like to call themselves disillusioned because the very form of the word suggests that they have had the illusions and emerged from them—have tried both worlds. The claim, however, is false in nine cases out of ten. The world is full of impostors who claim to be disenchanted and are really unenchanted: mere 'natural' men who have never risen so high as to be in danger of

the generous illusions they claim to have escaped from. Mr. Mencken is the perfect example. We need to be on our guard against such people. They talk like sages who have passed through the half-truths of humanitarian benevolence, aristocratic honour, or romantic passion, while in fact they are clods who have never yet advanced so far. Απειροκαλία is their disease; and Dryden himself is not free from it. He has not escaped from those enchantments which some find in Shelley; he has tried desperately to taste the like, and failed, and the fustian remains in his poetry like a scar on his face. He indeed deserves pity, since he has struggled against the disease, unlike our modern impostors who glory in it and call it health; but this does not alter the conclusion that he cannot be set against Shelley as one who knows against one who is deluded. If we granted the doctrine of Shelley's amiable ignorance of the one half of life, it would still but balance Dryden's banausic ignorance of the other.

But I do not grant the doctrine, and I do not see how it can be accepted by any one who has read Shelley's poetry with attention. It is simply not true to say that Shelley conceives the human soul as a naturally innocent and divinely beautiful creature, interfered with by external tyrants. On the contrary no other heathen writer comes nearer to stating and driving home the doctrine of original sin. In such an early work as *The Revolt of Islam* those who come 'from pouring human blood' are told to

Disguise it not—we have one human heart—
All mortal thoughts confess a common home. (viii. xix.)

and again,

Look on your mind—it is the book of fate—
Ah! it is dark with many a blazoned name
Of misery—all are mirrors of the same. (xx.)

This is weak, exclamatory poetry, I grant you, but my concern is with the *sentens*. When Shelley looks at and condemns the oppressor he does so with the full consciousness that he also is a man just like that: the evil is within as well as without; all are wicked, and this of course is the significance of the allegorical passage in *Prometheus Unbound*, where the Furies say to Prometheus

We will live through thee, one by one,
Like animal life, and though we can obscure not

The soul which burns within, that we will dwell
 Beside it, like a vain loud multitude
 Vexing the self-content of wisest men:
 That we will be dread thought beneath thy brain
 And foul desire round thine astonished heart,
 And blood within thy labyrinthine veins
 Crawling like agony.

Prom.

Why ye are thus now.

The same doctrine, more briefly and suggestively expressed, occurs in the *Triumph of Life*, where he explains the failure of the wise, the great, and the unforgotten by saying

their lore

Taught them not this, to know themselves; their might
 Could not repress *the mystery within*,
 And for the morn of truth they feigned, deep night
 Caught them ere evening. (211-15).

We mistake Shelley wholly if we do not understand that for him, as certainly as for St. Paul, humanity in its merely natural or 'given' condition is a body of death. It is true that the conclusion he draws is very different from that of St. Paul. To a Christian, conviction of sin is a good thing because it is the necessary preliminary to repentance; to Shelley it is an extremely dangerous thing. It begets self-contempt, and self-contempt begets misanthropy and cruelty. In *The Revolt of Islam* the passage I have already quoted leads up to the statement that it is this self-contempt which arms Hatred with a 'mortal sting.' The man who has once seen the darkness within himself will soon seek vengeance on others; and in *Prometheus* self-contempt is twice mentioned as an evil. I do not think we can seriously doubt that Shelley is right. If a man will not become a Christian, it is very undesirable that he should become aware of the reptilian inhabitants in his own mind. To know how bad we are, in the condition of mere nature, is an excellent recipe for becoming much worse. The process is very accurately described in some of the most memorable lines Shelley ever wrote:

'Tis a trick of this same family
 To analyse their own and other minds.
 Such self-anatomy shall teach the will
 Dangerous secrets: for it *tempts our powers*,
 Knowing what must be thought and may be done,

Into the depth of darkest purposes:
 So Cenci fell into the pit; even I
 Since Beatrice *unveiled me to myself,*
And made me shrink from what I cannot shun,
Show a poor figure to my own esteem,
To which I grow half reconciled . . .

(Cenci, II. ii. 108 et seq.)

The lines which I have italicized provide an excellent short history of thought and sentiment in the early twentieth century, and the whole passage is a measure of the difference between Byron and Shelley. Byron, speaking through his Byronic heroes, is in the very article of that process which Shelley describes, and rather proud of it. He suffers the predicament; Shelley observes and understands it. He understands it, I think, a good deal better than most of his modern critics.

Shelley's poetry presents a variety of kinds, most of them traditional. The elegy and the greater ode come down to him from the *exemplaria graeca* through eighteenth-century practice; the metrical structure of the latter is indeed rooted in a misunderstanding of Pindar, but a misunderstanding which had become itself a precedent by Shelley's time. *Swellfoot* is almost an attempt to revive the Old Comedy—an attempt which should interest Mr. Eliot since Shelley in it faces the cardinal problem of much of Mr. Eliot's poetry: namely, whether it is possible to distinguish poetry about squalor and chaos from squalid and chaotic poetry. I do not think it a great success. The lyrical drama is in part Aeschylean; in part, I think, Shelley's redemption of a bad eighteenth-century form. It derives from, and redeems, the drama of Mason, just as *The Prelude* and *Excursion* derive from, and confer new power upon, the eighteenth-century treatise-poem. Shelley's lyric is a greater novelty, but heavily indebted on the metrical side to Dryden himself. The fantastic tale or idyll (as in *Alastor* or the *Witch of Atlas*) probably derives from the mythological epyllion of the Elizabethans. In all these kinds Shelley produces works which, though not perfect, are in one way more satisfactory than any of Dryden's longer pieces: that is to say, they display a harmony between the poet's real and professed intention, they answer the demands of their forms, and they have unity of spirit. Shelley is at home in his best poems, his clothes, so to speak, fit him, as Dryden's do not. The faults are faults of execution, such as over-elaboration, occasional verbosity, and the like: mere stains on the surface. The faults in Dryden are fundamental discrepancies between the real and the assumed poetic character, or radical vices in the design:

diseases at the heart. Shelley could almost say with Racine, 'When my plan is made my poem is done'; with Dryden the plan itself usually foredooms the poem's failure.

Thus *Alastor* is a poem perfectly true to itself. The theme is universally interesting—the quest for ideal love. And both the theme and the treatment are fully suited to Shelley's powers. Hence the poem has an apparent ease, a noble obviousness, which deceives some readers. Mr. Eliot himself is too experienced a writer to be guilty of the delusion that he could write like Shelley if he chose; but I think many of Mr. Eliot's readers may suffer from it. They mistake the inevitability of *Alastor*, which really springs from the poet's harmony with his subject, for the facility of commonplace, and condemn the poem precisely because it is successful. Of course it has its faults—some of the scenery is over-written, and the form of line which ends with two long monosyllables comes too often. But these are not the sort of defects that kill a poem: the energy of imagination, which supports so lofty, remote, and lonely an emotion almost without a false note for seven hundred lines, remains; and it deserves to be admired, if in no higher way, at least as we admire a great suspension-bridge. I address myself, of course, only to those who are prepared, by toleration of the theme, to let the poem have a fair hearing. For those who are not, we can only say that they may doubtless be very worthy people, but they have no place in the European tradition.

Perhaps this muscular sustaining power is even more noticeable in the *Witch of Atlas*, for there Shelley goes more out of himself. In *Alastor* the congeniality of the theme was fully given in Shelley's temper; in the *Witch* he is going successfully beyond the bounds of his temper—making himself something other than he was. For in this poem we have, indeed, Shelley's ordinary romantic love of the fantastical and ideal, but all keyed down, muted, deftly inhibited from its native solemnity and intensity in order to produce a lighter, more playful effect. The theme, at bottom, is as serious as ever; but the handling 'turns all to favour and to prettiness.' The lightness and liquidity of this piece, the sensation which we feel in reading it of seeing things distinctly, yet at a vast distance, cannot be paralleled in any poem that I know. We must go to another art, namely to music, to find anything at all similar; and there we shall hardly find it outside Mozart. It could not, indeed, have been written if Shelley had not read the Italians; but it is a new modification, and in it all the light-hearted dancing perfection of Ariosto is detached from Ariosto's hardness and flippancy (though not from his irony) and used with a difference—disturbed by overtones, etherialized.

The whole poem is a happy reproof to that new Puritanism which has captured so many critics and taught us to object to pleasure in poetry simply because it is pleasure. It is natural, though regrettable, that such people should be exasperated by this mercurial poem; for to them it is *muching mallecho* (as Shelley said of *Peter Bell*) and means, as so much of his poetry means, mischief. They know very well that they are being laughed at; and they do not like to be told how

Heaven and Earth conspire to foil
The over-busy gardener's blundering toil.

If Shelley had written only such poems he would have shown his genius: his artistry, the discipline and power of obedience which makes genius universal, are better shown elsewhere. *Adonais* naturally occurs to the mind, for here we see Shelley fruitfully submitting to the conventions of a well-established form. It has all the traditional features of the elegy—the opening dirge, the processional allegory, and the concluding consolation. There is one bad error of taste. The Muse, lamenting *Adonais*, is made to lament her own immortality,

I would give
All that I am to be as thou now art!
But I am chained to Time, and cannot thence depart.
(xxvi.)

This is to make a goddess speak like a new-made human widow, and to dash the public solemnity of elegy with the violent passions of a personal lyric. How much more fitting are the words of the Roman poet:

Immortales mortales flere si foret fas,
Flerent divae Camenae Naevium poetam.

But it is a slip soon recovered, and not to be compared with the prolonged indecorum of Dryden's satiric conceits in his elegy for Mrs. Anne Killigrew:

To the next realm she stretch'd her sway
For Painture near adjoining lay
A plenteous province, and alluring prey.
A chamber of Dependencies was fram'd
(As conquerors will never want pretence,
When arm'd, to justify th' offence)
And the whole fief, in right of poetry, she claim'd.
The country open lay without defence, &c.

There are eighteen lines of it, and I do not know whether any major poet other than Dryden ever played such silly tricks at a funeral. No one demands that every poet should write an elegy: let each man be a master of his own trade. But the fact remains that when Shelley intends to do so, he does so; Dryden, equally intending, does not—*nimum amator ingenii sui*. I do not now speak of the unexampled rapture of Shelley's close. I might do so if I were to argue with Dryden, for he loves this ecstasy and quotes with approval *furentis animi vaticinatio*; being often a romantic in wish, though seldom happily romantic in the event. But I do not know whether Mr. Eliot shares Dryden's admiration for 'those enthusiastic parts of poetry'; and I would prefer to argue from positions that are, or ought in logic to be, admitted by Mr. Eliot. But I have slipped into that sentence 'If I were to argue with Dryden' unawares. Let no one suppose I am such a coxcomb as to think that my defence of Shelley could stand against Dryden's humane and luminous and Olympian dialectic; or, indeed, that it would be required in the presence of one who would almost certainly shame and anticipate me with such generous praise of Shelley as he has given to Shakespeare, or Milton, or Tasso, and a frank acknowledgment (he made more than one) of his own offences against the laws of poetry. Whoever else is a Drydenian in Mr. Eliot's way, I have no fear lest Dryden himself should be one.

Of course Shelley too had his failures. *The Revolt of Islam* does not really exist much more than *The Hind and the Panther* exists, and the ruin is less redeemed by fine passages. *The Letter to Maria Gisborne* is little better than a draft—a thing scrawled as quickly as the pen would cover the paper and really unfit for the printer. *Peter Bell the Third* is a more doubtful case. I am not prepared to endure either its squalors or its obscurity by any such moderate promise of enjoyment as it holds out; but perhaps the creator of Sweeney ought to have more patience both with the one and with the other. I do not greatly admire—but perhaps some of Mr. Eliot's weaker disciples should—this little picture:

As he was speaking came a spasm
And wrenched his gnashing teeth asunder:
Like one who sees a strange phantasm
He lay—there was a silent chasm
Between his upper jaw and under.

Epipsychidion raises in an acute form a problem with which Mr. Eliot has been much occupied: I mean the problem of the relation between

our judgement on a poem as critics, and our judgement as men on the ethics, metaphysics, or theology presupposed or expressed in the poem. For my own part, I do not believe that the poetic value of any poem is identical with the philosophic; but I think they can differ only to a limited extent, so that every poem whose prosaic or intellectual basis is silly, shallow, perverse, or illiberal, or even radically erroneous, is in some degree crippled by that fact. I am thus obliged to rate *Epipsychidion* rather low, because I consider the thought implied in it a dangerous delusion. In it Shelley is trying to stand on a particular rung of the Platonic ladder, and I happen to believe firmly that that particular rung does not exist, and that the man who thinks he is standing on it is not standing but falling. But no view that we can adopt will remove *Epipsychidion* from the slate. There is an element of spiritual, and also of carnal, passion in it, each expressed with great energy and sensibility, and the whole is marred, but not completely, by the false mode (as Mr. Eliot and I would maintain) in which the poet tries to blend them. It is particularly interesting to notice the internal, perhaps unconscious, control which arises amidst the very intensity of the experience and tightens up the metrical form: the first forty lines are almost 'stopped couplets' and the whole movement is much closer to Dryden's couplet than to that of Keats.

But we are now rapidly approaching that part of our subject where the difference between Mr. Eliot and myself ceases. In his essay on Dante, Mr. Eliot says that he thinks the last canto of the *Paradiso* 'the highest point that poetry has ever reached.'⁷ I think the same—and since it is so pleasant to agree, let me add irrelevantly that I think as he does about the *Bhagavad-Gita*.⁸ And a few pages later Mr. Eliot singles Shelley out as the one English poet of his century (I would have said the one English poet yet recorded) 'who could even have begun to follow' Dante's footsteps;⁹ and he generously allows that Shelley, at the end of his life, was beginning to profit by his knowledge of Dante. I do not know how much of Shelley's work Mr. Eliot would admit by this concession. I suppose he would admit, at the very least, the *Triumph of Life*. If any passage in our poetry has profited by Dante, it is the unforgettable appearance of Rousseau in that poem—though admittedly it is only the Dante of the *Inferno*. But I am not without hope that Mr. Eliot might be induced to include more. In this same essay he speaks of a modern 'prejudice against beatitude as material for poetry.'¹⁰ Now Dante is eminently the poet of beatitude. He has not only no rival, but none second to him. But if we were asked to name the poet who

most nearly deserved this inaccessible *proxime accessit*, I should name Shelley. Indeed, my claim for Shelley might be represented by the proposition that Shelley and Milton are, each, the half of Dante. I do not know how we could describe Dante better to one who had not read him, than by some such device as the following:

'You know the massive quality of Milton, the sense that every word is being held in place by a gigantic pressure, so that there is an architectural sublime in every verse whether the matter be sublime at the moment or not. You know also the air and fire of Shelley, the very antithesis of the Miltonic solidity, the untrammelled, reckless speed through pellucid spaces which makes us imagine while we are reading him that we have somehow left our bodies behind. If now you can imagine (but you cannot, for it must seem impossible till you see it done) a poetry which combined these two all-but incompatibles—a poetry as bright and piercing and aerial as the one, yet as weighty, as pregnant and as lapidary as the other, then you will know what Dante is like.'

To be thus half of Dante (Caesar is my authority for such a rarefied critical symbolism) is fame enough for any ordinary poet. And Shelley, I contend, reaches this height in the fourth act of *Prometheus*.

Genetically considered, the fourth act, we know, is an afterthought: teleologically it is that for which the poem exists. I do not mean by this that the three preceding acts are mere means; but that their significance and beauty are determined by what follows, and that what came last in the writing (as it comes last in the reading) is 'naturally prior' in the Aristotelian sense. It does not add to, and therefore corrupt, a completed structure; it gives structure to that which, without it, would be imperfect. The resulting whole is the greatest long poem in the nineteenth century, and the only long poem of the highest kind in that century which approaches to perfection.

The theme is one of sane, public, and perennial interest—that of rebirth, regeneration, the new cycle. Like all great myths its primary appeal is to the imagination: its indirect and further appeal to the will and the understanding can therefore be diversely interpreted according as the reader is a Christian, a politician, a psycho-analyst, or what not. Myth is thus like manna; it is to each man a different dish and to each the dish he needs. It does not grow old nor stick at frontiers racial, sexual, or philosophic; and even from the same man at the same moment it can elicit different responses at different levels. But great myth is

rare in a reflective age; the temptation to allegorize, to thrust into the story the conscious doctrines of the poet, there to fight it out as best they can with the inherent tendency of the fable, is usually too strong. *Faust* and the *Niblung's Ring*—the only other great mythical poems of modern times—have in this way been partially spoiled. The excellence of Shelley is that he has avoided this. He has found what is, for him, the one perfect story and re-made it so well that the ancient version now seems merely embryonic. In his poem there is no strain between the literal sense and the imaginative significance. The events which are needed to produce the λύσις seem to become the symbols of the spiritual process he is presenting without effort or artifice or even consciousness on his part.

The problem was not an easy one. We are to start with the soul chained, aged, suffering; and we are to end with the soul free, rejuvenated, and blessed. The selection of the Prometheus story (a selection which seems obvious only because we did not have to make it) is the first step to the solution. But nearly everything has still to be done. By what steps are we to pass from Prometheus in his chains to Prometheus free? The long years of his agony cannot be dramatically represented, for they are static. The actual moment of liberation by Heracles is a mere piece of 'business.' Dramatic necessity demands that the Titan himself should do or say something before his liberation—and if possible something that will have an effect on the action. Shelley answers this by beginning with Prometheus's revocation of the curse upon Jupiter. Now mark how everything falls into place for the poet who well and truly obeys his imagination. This revocation at once introduces the phantasm of Jupiter, the original curse on the phantasm's lips, and the despair of Earth and Echoes at what seems to be Prometheus's capitulation. We thus get at one stroke a good opening episode and a fine piece of irony, on the dramatic level; but we also have suggested the phantasmal or nightmare nature of the incubus under which the soul (or the world) is groaning, and the prime necessity for a change of heart in the sufferer, who is in some sort his own prisoner. Prometheus, we are made to feel, has really stepped out of prison with the words, 'It doth repent me.' But once again structural and spiritual necessities join hands to postpone his effective liberation. On the structural side, the play must go on; on the other, we know, and Shelley knows, how long a journey separates the first resolve, from the final remaking, of a man, a nation, or a world. The Furies will return, and the act closes with low-toned melodies of sadness and of hopes that are as yet remote and notional.

The whole of the next act, in story, is occupied with the difficult efforts

of Asia to apprehend and follow a dream dreamed in the shadow of Prometheus: the difficult journey which it leads her; her difficult descent to the depths of the earth; and her final reascension, transformed, to the light. Difficulty is, so to speak, the subject of this act. The dramatic advantage of splitting the sufferer's role into two parts, those of Prometheus and Asia, and of giving the latter a task to perform in the liberation, is sufficiently obvious. But we hardly need to notice this. Most of us, while we read this act, are too absorbed, I fancy, by the new sensation it creates in us. The gradual ineluctable approach of the unknown, where the unknown is sinister, is not an uncommon theme in literature; but where else are we to find this more medicinable theme—these shy approaches, and sudden recessions, and returnings beyond hope, and swellings and strengthenings of a far-off, uncertainly prognosticated good? And again, it is a necessity for Shelley, simply because he has placed his fiend in the sky, to make Asia go down, not up, to fetch this good; but how miraculously it all fits in! Does any reader, whether his prepossessions be psychological or theological, question this descent into hell, this return to the womb, this death, as the proper path for Asia to take? Our imaginations, constrained by deepest necessities, accept all that imagery of interwoven trees and dew and moss whereby the chorus drench the second scene with darkness, and the softness and damp of growing things: by the same necessity they accept the harsher images of the final precipitous descent to Demogorgon's cave, and the seated darkness which we find there. It is out of all this, silver against this blackness, that the piercing song of Asia's reascension comes; and if any one who has read that song in its setting still supposes that the poet is talking about Godwin or the Revolution, or that Shelley is any other than a very great poet, I cannot help him. But for my own part I believe that no poet has felt more keenly, or presented more weightily the necessity for a complete unmaking and remaking of man, to be endured at the dark bases of his being. I do not know the book (in profane literature) to which I should turn for a like expression of what von Hügel would have called the 'costingness' of regeneration.

The third act is the least successful: Shelley's error was not to see that he could shorten it when once he had conceived the fourth. Yet some leisure and some slackened tension are here allowable. We are certainly not ready for the fourth act at once. Between the end of torment and the beginning of ecstasy there must be a pause: peace comes before beatitude. It would be ridiculous, in point of achievement, to compare this weak act in Shelley's play with the triumphant con-

clusion of the *Purgatorio*; but structurally it corresponds to the position of the earthly paradise between purgatory and heaven. And in one scene at least it is worthy of its theme. The dialogue between Ocean and Apollo (at 'the mouth of a great river in the island Atlantis') is among his best things: a divine indolence soaks it, and if there are better lines in English poetry there are none that breathe a more heartfelt peace than Ocean's:

It is the unpastured sea hungering for calm:
Peace, monster. I come now. Farewell.

The fourth act I shall not attempt to analyse. It is an intoxication, a riot, a complicated and uncontrollable splendour, long, and yet not too long, sustained on the note of ecstasy such as no other English poet, perhaps no other poet, has given us. It can be achieved by more than one artist in music: to do it in words has been, I think, beyond the reach of nearly all. It has not, and cannot have, the solemnity and overwhelming realism of the *Paradiso*, but it has all its fire and light. It has not the 'sober certainty of waking bliss' which makes Milton's paradise so inhabitable—but it sings from regions in our consciousness that Milton never entered.

Some anti-romantic repudiations of such poetry rest, perhaps, on a misunderstanding. It might be true, as the materialists must hold, that there is no possible way by which men can arrive at such felicity; or again, as Mr. Eliot and I believe, that there is one Way, and only one, and that Shelley has missed it. But while we discuss these things, the romantic poet has added meaning to the word Felicity itself. Whatever the result of our debate, we had better attend to his discovery lest we remain more ignorant than we need have been of the very thing about which we debated.

NOTES

1. *Selected Essays*, 1932, p. 295.
2. *Op. cit.*, p. 296.
3. *Op. cit.*, p. 297.
4. *Ibid.*
5. It will be noticed that even if the premisses were true, the inference is invalid. A similar parallogism has occurred about Mr. Housman (of course,

since his death) in the form, 'Kipling is bad. Some lines of Housman are like some lines of Kipling. Therefore Housman is bad.'

6. That is, nothing more in the usual strain. For a reprint of *Political Justice* (a book very difficult to find) I am all agog: it is not likely to be so dull as our critical tradition proclaims.

7. Op. cit., p. 227.

8. Op. cit., p. 244.

9. Op. cit., p. 250.

10. Ibid.

Shelley

IF Shelley had not received some distinguished attention in recent years (and he has been differed over by the most eminent critics) there might, perhaps, have seemed little point in attempting a restatement of the essential critical observations—the essential observations, that is, in the reading and appreciation of Shelley's poetry. For they would seem to be obvious enough. Yet it is only one incitement out of many when a critic of peculiar authority, contemplating the common change from being 'intoxicated by Shelley's poetry at the age of fifteen' to finding it now 'almost unreadable,' invokes for explanation the nature of Shelley's 'ideas' and, in reference to them, that much-canvassed question of the day, 'the question of belief or disbelief':

'It is not so much that thirty years ago I was able to read Shelley under an illusion which experience has dissipated, as that because the question of belief or disbelief did not arise I was in a much better position to enjoy the poetry. I can only regret that Shelley did not live to put his poetic gifts, which were certainly of the first order, at the service of more tenable beliefs—which need not have been, for my purposes, beliefs more acceptable to me.'

This is, of course, a personal statement; but perhaps if one insists on the more obvious terms of literary criticism—more strictly critical terms—in which such a change might be explained, and suggests that the terms actually used might be found unfortunate in their effect, the impertinence will not be unpardonable. It does, in short, seem worth endeavour-

From *Revaluation: Tradition and Development in English Poetry* (George W. Stewart, Publisher, Inc., and Chatto and Windus Ltd., London, 1949), pp. 203–32. Reprinted by permission of Chatto and Windus Ltd.

ing to make finally plain that, when one dissents from persons who, sympathizing with Shelley's revolutionary doctrines and with his idealistic ardours and fervours—with his 'beliefs,' exalt him as a poet, it is strictly the 'poetry' one is criticizing. There would also appear to be some reason for insisting that in finding Shelley almost unreadable one need not be committing oneself to a fashionably limited taste—an inability to appreciate unfashionable kinds of excellence or to understand a use of words that is unlike Hopkins's or Donne's.

It will be well to start, in fact, by examining the working of Shelley's poetry—his characteristic modes of expression—as exemplified in one of his best poems.

Thou on whose stream, mid the steep sky's commotion,
 Loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves are shed,
 Shook from the tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean,

 Angels of rain and lightning: there are spread
 On the blue surface of thine æry surge,
 Like the bright hair uplifted from the head

 Of some fierce Maenad, even from the dim verge
 Of the horizon to the zenith's height,
 The locks of the approaching storm.

The sweeping movement of the verse, with the accompanying plangency, is so potent that, as many can testify, it is possible to have been for years familiar with the Ode—to know it by heart—without asking the obvious questions. In what respects are the 'loose clouds' like 'decaying leaves'? The correspondence is certainly not in shape, colour or way of moving. It is only the vague general sense of windy tumult that associates the clouds and the leaves; and, accordingly, the appropriateness of the metaphor 'stream' in the first line is not that it suggests a surface on which, like leaves, the clouds might be 'shed,' but that it contributes to the general 'streaming' effect in which the inappropriateness of 'shed' passes unnoticed. What again, are those 'tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean'? They stand for nothing that Shelley could have pointed to in the scene before him; the 'boughs,' it is plain, have grown out of the 'leaves' in the previous line, and we are not to ask what the tree is. Nor are we to scrutinize closely the 'stream' metaphor as developed: that 'blue surface' must be the concave of the sky, an oddly smooth surface for a 'surge'—if we consider a moment. But in this poetic surge, while we let ourselves be swept along, there is no considering, the image doesn't challenge any inconvenient degree of realization, and

the oddness is lost. Then again, in what ways does the approach of a storm ('loose clouds like earth's decaying leaves,' 'like ghosts from an enchanter fleeing') suggest streaming hair? The appropriateness of the Maenad, clearly, lies in the pervasive suggestion of frenzied onset, and we are not to ask whether her bright hair is to be seen as streaming out in front of her (as, there is no need to assure ourselves, it might be doing if she were running before a still swifter gale: in the kind of reading that got so far as proposing to itself this particular reassurance no general satisfaction could be exacted from Shelley's imagery).

Here, clearly, in these peculiarities of imagery and sense, peculiarities analysable locally in the mode of expression, we have the manifestation of essential characteristics—the Shelleyan characteristics as envisaged by the criticism that works on a philosophical plane and makes judgments of a moral order. In the growth of those 'tangled boughs' out of the leaves, exemplifying as it does a general tendency of the images to forget the status of the metaphor or simile that introduced them and to assume an autonomy and a right to propagate, so that we lose in confused generations and perspectives the perception or thought that was the ostensible *raison d'être* of imagery, we have a recognized essential trait of Shelley's: his weak grasp upon the actual. This weakness, of course, commonly has more or less creditable accounts given of it—idealism, Platonism and so on; and even as unsentimental a judge as Mr. Santayana correlates Shelley's inability to learn from experience with his having been born a 'nature preformed, a 'spokesman of the *a priori*,' 'a dogmatic, inspired, perfect and incorrigible creature.'¹ It seems to me that Mr. Santayana's essay, admirable as it is, rates the poetry too high. But for the moment it will be enough to recall limitations that are hardly disputed: Shelley was not gifted for drama or narrative. Having said this, I realize that I had forgotten the conventional standing of *The Cenci*; but controversy may be postponed: it is at any rate universally agreed that (to shift tactfully to positive terms) Shelley's genius was 'essentially lyrical.'

This predicate would, in common use, imply a special emotional intensity—a vague gloss, but it is difficult to go further without slipping into terms that are immediately privative and limiting. Thus there is certainly a sense in which Shelley's poetry is peculiarly emotional, and when we try to define this sense we find ourselves invoking an absence of something. The point may be best made, perhaps, by recalling the observation noted above, that one may have been long familiar with the *Ode to the West Wind* without ever having asked the obvious ques-

tions; questions that propose themselves at the first critical inspection. This poetry induces—depends for its success on inducing—a kind of attention that doesn't bring the critical intelligence into play: the imagery feels right, the associations work appropriately, if (as it takes conscious resistance not to do) one accepts the immediate feeling and doesn't slow down to think.

Shelley himself can hardly have asked the questions. Not that he didn't expend a great deal of critical labour upon his verse. 'He composed rapidly and attained to perfection by intensive correction. He would sometimes write down a phrase with alterations and rejections time after time until it came within a measure of satisfying him. Words are frequently substituted for others and lines interpolated.' The *Ode to the West Wind* itself, as is shown in the repository² of fragments the preface to which supplies these observations, profited by the process described, which must be allowed to have been in some sense critical. But the critical part of Shelley's creative labour was a matter of getting the verse to feel right, and feeling, for Shelley as a poet, had—as the insistent concern for 'rightness,' the typical final product being what it is, serves to emphasise—little to do with thinking (though Shelley was in some ways a very intelligent man).

We have here, if not sufficient justification for the predicate 'essentially lyrical,' certainly a large part of the reason for Shelley's being found essentially poetical by the succeeding age. He counted, in fact, for a great deal in what came to be the prevailing idea of 'the poetical'—the idea that had its latest notable statement in Professor Housman's address, *The Name and Nature of Poetry*. The Romantic conceptions of genius and inspiration³ developed (the French Revolution and its ideological background must, of course, be taken into account) in reaction against the Augustan insistence on the social and the rational. When Wordsworth says that 'all good poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings' he is of his period, though the intended force of this dictum, the force it has in its context and in relation to Wordsworth's own practice, is very different from that given it when Shelley assents, or when it is assimilated to Byron's 'poetry is the lava of the imagination, whose eruption prevents an earthquake.'⁴ But Byron was for the young Tennyson (and the Ruskin parents)⁵ the poet, and Shelley (Brown-ing's 'Sun-treader') was the idol of the undergraduate Tennyson and his fellow Apostles, and, since the poetry of 'the age of Wordsworth' became canonical, the assent given to Wordsworth's dictum has commonly been Shelleyan.

The force of Shelley's insistence on spontaneity is simple and unequivocal. It will be enough to recall a representative passage or two from the *Defence of Poetry*:

'for the mind in creation is as a fading coal, which some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind, awakes to transitory brightness; this power arises from within, like the colour of a flower which fades and changes as it is developed, and the conscious portions of our nature are unprophetic either of its approach or its departure.'

'Inspiration' is not something to be tested, clarified, defined and developed in composition,

'but when composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conceptions of the poet. . . . The toil and delay recommended by critics can be justly interpreted to mean no more than a careful observation of the inspired moments, and an artificial connexion of the spaces between their suggestions, by the intertexture of conventional expressions; a necessity only imposed by the limitedness of the poetical faculty itself. . . .'

The 'poetical faculty,' we are left no room for doubting, can, of its very nature, have nothing to do with any discipline, and can be associated with conscious effort only mechanically and externally, and when Shelley says that Poetry

'is not subject to the control of the active powers of the mind, and that its birth and recurrence have no necessary connexion with consciousness or will'

he is not saying merely that the 'active powers of the mind' are insufficient in themselves for creation—that poetry cannot be written merely by taking thought. The effect of Shelley's eloquence is to hand poetry over to a sensibility that has no more dealings with intelligence than it can help; to a 'poetic faculty' that, for its duly responsive vibrating (though the poet must reverently make his pen as sensitive an instrument as possible to 'observe'—in the scientific sense—the vibrations), demands that active intelligence shall be, as it were, switched off.

Shelley, of course, had ideas and ideals; he wrote philosophical essays, and it need not be irrelevant to refer, in discussing his poetry, to Plato, Godwin and other thinkers. But there is nothing grasped in

the poetry—no object offered for contemplation, no realized presence to persuade or move us by what it is. A. C. Bradley, remarking that 'Shelley's ideals of good, whether as a character or as a mode of life, resting as they do on abstraction from the mass of real existence, tend to lack body and individuality,' adds: 'But we must remember that Shelley's strength and weakness are closely allied, and it may be that the very abstractness of his ideal was a condition of that quivering intensity of aspiration towards it in which his poetry is unequalled.'⁶ That is the best that can be respectably said. Actually, that 'quivering intensity,' offered in itself apart from any substance, offered instead of any object, is what, though it may make Shelley intoxicating at fifteen makes him almost unreadable, except in very small quantities of his best, to the mature. Even when he is in his own way unmistakably a distinguished poet, as in *Prometheus Unbound*, it is impossible to go on reading him at any length with pleasure; the elusive imagery, the high-pitched emotions, the tone and movement, the ardours, ecstasies and despairs, are too much the same all through. The effect is of vanity and emptiness (Arnold was right) as well as monotony.

The force of the judgment that feeling in Shelley's poetry is divorced from thought needs examining further. Any suspicion that Donne is the implied criterion will, perhaps, be finally averted if for the illuminating contrast we go to Wordsworth. Wordsworth is another 'Romantic' poet; he too is undramatic; and he too invites the criticism (Arnold, his devoted admirer, made it) that he lacks variety. 'Thought' will hardly be found an assertive presence in his best poetry; in so far as the term suggests an overtly active energy it is decidedly inappropriate. 'Emotion,' his own word, is the word most readers would insist on, though they would probably judge Wordsworth's emotion to be less lyrical than Shelley's. The essential difference, however—and it is a very important one—seems, for present purposes, more relevantly stated in the terms I used in discussing Wordsworth's 'recollection in tranquillity.' The process covered by this phrase was one of emotional discipline, critical exploration of experience, pondered valuation and maturing reflection. As a result of it an organization is engaged in Wordsworth's poetry, and the activity and standards of critical intelligence are implicit.

An associated difference was noted in the sureness with which Wordsworth grasps the world of common perception. The illustration suggested was *The Simplan Pass* in comparison with Shelley's *Mont Blanc*. The element of Wordsworth in *Mont Blanc* (it is perceptible in these opening lines) serves only to enhance the contrast:

The everlasting universe of things
 Flows through the mind, and rolls its rapid waves,
 Now dark—now glittering—now reflecting gloom—
 Now lending splendour, where from secret springs
 The source of human thought its tribute brings
 Of waters—with a sound but half its own,
 Such as a feeble brook will oft assume
 In the wild woods, among the mountains lone,
 Where waterfalls around it leap for ever,
 Where woods and winds contend, and a vast river
 Over its rocks ceaselessly bursts and raves.

The metaphorical and the actual, the real and the imagined, the inner and the outer, could hardly be more unsortably and indistinguishably confused. The setting, of course, provides special excuse for bewildered confusion; but Shelley takes eager advantage of the excuse and the confusion is characteristic—what might be found unusual in *Mont Blanc* is a certain compelling vividness. In any case, Wordsworth himself is explicitly offering a sense of sublime bewilderment, similarly inspired:

Black drizzling crags that spake by the wayside
 As if a voice were in them, the sick sight
 And giddy prospect of the raving stream,
 The unfettered clouds and region of the heavens,
 Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light—
 Were all like workings of one mind, the features
 Of the same face . . .

He is, of course, recollecting in tranquillity; but the collectedness of those twenty lines (as against Shelley's one hundred and forty) does not belong merely to the record; it was present (or at least the movement towards it was) in the experience, as those images, 'one mind,' 'the same face'—epitomizing, as they do, the contrast with Shelley's ecstatic dissipation—may fairly be taken to testify.

This comparison does not aim immediately at a judgment of relative value. *Mont Blanc* is very interesting as well as idiosyncratic, and is not obviously the product of the less rare gift. There are, nevertheless, critical judgments to be made—judgments concerning the emotional quality of Wordsworth's poetry and of Shelley's: something more than mere description of idiosyncrasy is in view. What should have come out in the comparison that started as a note on Wordsworth's grasp of the outer world is the unobtrusiveness with which that 'outer' turns into

'inner': the antithesis, clearly, is not altogether, for present purposes, a simple one to apply. What is characteristic of Wordsworth is to grasp surely (which, in the nature of the case, must be delicately and subtly) what he offers, whether this appears as belonging to the outer world—the world as perceived, or to inner experience. He seems always to be presenting an object (wherever this may belong) and the emotion seems to derive from what is presented. The point is very obviously and impressively exemplified in *A slumber did my spirit seal*, which shows Wordsworth at his supreme height. Here (compare it with the *Ode to the West Wind*, where we have Shelley's genius at its best; or, if something more obviously comparable is required, with Tennyson's *Break, break, break*) there is no emotional comment—nothing 'emotional' in phrasing, movement or tone; the facts seem to be presented barely, and the emotional force to be generated by them in the reader's mind when he has taken them in—generated by the two juxtaposed stanzas, in the contrast between the situations or states they represent.

Shelley, at his best and worst, offers the emotion in itself, unattached, in the void. 'In itself' 'for itself'—it is an easy shift to the pejorative implications of 'for its own sake'; just as, for a poet with the habit of sensibility and expression described, it was an easy shift to deserving them. For Shelley is obnoxious to the pejorative implications of 'habit': being inspired was, for him, too apt to mean surrendering to a kind of hypnotic rote of favourite images, associations and words. 'Inspiration,' there not being an organization for it to engage (as in Wordsworth, whose sameness is of a different order from Shelley's, there was), had only poetical habits to fall back on. We have them in their most innocent aspect in those favourite words: *radiant, aerial, odorous, daedal, faint, sweet, bright, winged, -inwoven*, and the rest of the fondled vocabulary that any reader of Shelley could go on enumerating. They manifest themselves as decidedly deplorable in *The Cloud* and *To a Skylark*, which illustrate the dangers of fostering the kind of inspiration that works only when critical intelligence is switched off. These poems may be not unfairly described as the products of switching poetry on.⁷ There has been in recent years some controversy about particular points in *To a Skylark*, and there are a score or more points inviting adverse criticism. But this need hardly be offered; it is, or should be, so plain that the poem is a mere tumbled out spate ('spontaneous overflow') of poeticalities, the place of each one of which Shelley could have filled with another without the least difficulty and without making any essential difference. They are held together by the pervasive 'lyrical emotion,' and that this should

be capable of holding them together is comment enough on the nature of its strength.

Cheaper surrenders to inspiration may easily be found in the collected Shelley; there are, for instance, gross indulgences in the basest Regency album taste.⁸ But criticism of Shelley has something more important to deal with than mere bad poetry; or, rather, there are badnesses inviting the criticism that involves moral judgments. It must have already appeared (it has virtually been said) that surrendering to inspiration cannot, for a poet of Shelley's emotional habits, have been very distinguishable from surrendering to temptation. The point comes out in an element of the favoured vocabulary not exemplified above: *charnel*, *corpse*, *phantom*, *liberticide*, *aghast*, *ghastly* and so on. The wrong approach to emotion, the approach from the wrong side or end (so to speak), is apparent here; Shelley would clearly have done well not to have indulged these habits and these likings: the viciousness and corruption are immediately recognizable. But viciousness and corruption do not less attend upon likings for tender ('I love Love'),⁹ sympathetic, exalted and ecstatic emotions, and may be especially expected to do so in a mind as little able to hold an object in front of it as Shelley's was.

The transition from the lighter concerns of literary criticism to the diagnosis of radical disabilities and perversions, such as call for moral comment, may be conveniently illustrated from a favourite anthology-piece, *When the lamp is shattered*:

When the lamp is shattered
The light in the dust lies dead—
When the cloud is scattered
The rainbow's glory is shed.
When the lute is broken,
Sweet tones are remembered not;
When the lips have spoken,
Loved accents are soon forgot.

As music and splendour
Survive not the lamp and the lute,
The heart's echoes render
No song when the spirit is mute:—
No song but sad dirges,
Like the wind through a ruined cell;
Or the mournful surges
That ring the dead seaman's knell.

SHELLEY

When hearts have once mingled
Love first leaves the well-built nest;
The weak one is singled
To endure what it once possessed.
O Love! who bewailest
The frailty of all things here,
Why choose you the frailest
For your cradle, your home, and your bier?

Its passions will rock thee
As the storms rock the ravens on high;
Bright reason will mock thee,
Like the sun from a wintry sky.
From thy nest every rafter
Will rot, and thine eagle home
Leave thee naked to laughter,
When leaves fall and cold winds come.

The first two stanzas call for no very close attention—to say so, indeed, is to make the main criticism, seeing that they offer a show of insistent argument. However, reading with an unsolicited closeness, one may stop at the second line and ask whether the effect got with 'lies dead' is legitimate. Certainly, the emotional purpose of the poem is served, but the emotional purpose that went on being served in that way would be suspect. Leaving the question in suspense, perhaps, one passes to 'shed'; 'shed' as tears, petals and coats are shed, or as light is shed? The latter would be a rather more respectable use of the word in connexion with a rainbow's glory, but the context indicates the former. Only in the vaguest and slackest state of mind—of imagination and thought—could one so describe the fading of a rainbow; but for the right reader 'shed' sounds right, the alliteration with 'shattered' combining with the verse-movement to produce a kind of inevitability. And, of course, suggesting tears and the last rose of summer, it suits with the general emotional effect. The nature of this is by now so unmistakable that the complete nullity of the clinching 'so,' when it arrives—of the two lines that justify the ten preparatory lines of analogy—seems hardly worth stopping to note:

The heart's echoes render
No song when the spirit is mute.

Nor is it surprising that there should turn out to be a song after all, and a pretty powerful one—for those who like that sort of thing; the 'sad

dirges,' the 'ruined cell,' the 'mournful surges' and the 'dead seaman's knell' being immediately recognizable as currency values. Those who take pleasure in recognizing and accepting them are not at the same time exacting about sense.

The critical interest up to this point has been to see Shelley, himself (when inspired) so unexacting about sense, giving himself so completely to sentimental banalities. With the next stanza it is much the same, though the emotional *clichés* take on a grosser unction and the required abeyance of thought (and imagination) becomes more remarkable. In what form are we to imagine Love leaving the well-built nest? For readers who get so far as asking, there can be no acceptable answer. It would be unpoetically literal to suggest that, since the weak one is singled, the truant must be the mate, and, besides, it would raise unnecessary difficulties. Perhaps the mate, the strong one, is what the weak one, deserted by Love, whose alliance made possession once possible, now has to endure? But the suggestion is frivolous; the sense is plain enough—enough, that is, for those who respond to the sentiment. Sufficient recognition of the sense depends neither on thinking, nor on realization of the metaphors, but on response to the sentimental commonplaces: it is only when intelligence and imagination insist on intruding that difficulties arise. So plain is this that there would be no point in contemplating the metaphorical complexity that would develop if we could take the tropes seriously and tried to realize Love making of the weak one, whom it (if we evade the problem of sex) leaves behind in the well-built nest, a cradle, a home and a bier.

The last stanza brings a notable change; it alone in the poem has any distinction, and its personal quality, characteristically Shelleyan, stands out against the sentimental conventionality of the rest. The result is to compel a more radical judgment on the poem than has yet been made. In 'Its passions will rock thee' the 'passions' must be those of Love, so that it can no longer be Love that is being apostrophized. Who, then, is 'thee'? The 'frailest'—the 'weak one'—it would appear. But any notion one may have had that the 'weak one,' as the conventional sentiments imply, is the woman must be abandoned: the 'eagle home,' to which the 'well-built nest' so incongruously turns, is the Poet's. The familiar timbre, the desolate intensity (note particularly the use of 'bright' in 'bright reason'), puts it beyond doubt that Shelley is, characteristically, addressing himself—the 'pardlike Spirit beautiful and swift,' the 'Love in desolation masked,' the 'Power girt round with weakness.'

Characteristically: that is, Shelley's characteristic pathos is self-

regarding, directed upon an idealized self in the way suggested by the tags just quoted.¹⁰ This is patently so in some of his best poetry; for instance, in the *Ode to the West Wind*. Even there, perhaps, one may find something too like an element of luxury in the poignancy (at any rate, one's limiting criticism of the Ode would move towards such a judgment); and that in general there must be dangers and weakness attending upon such a habit will hardly be denied. The poem just examined shows how gross may be, in Shelley, the corruptions that are incident. He can make self-pity a luxury at such a level that the conventional pathos of album poeticizing, not excluding the banalities about (it is plainly so in the third stanza) the sad lot of woman, can come in to gratify the appetite.

The abeyance of thought exhibited by the first three stanzas now takes on a more sinister aspect. The switching-off of intelligence that is necessary if the sentiments of the third stanza are to be accepted has now to be invoked in explanation of a graver matter—Shelley's ability to accept the grosser, the truly corrupt, gratifications that have just been indicated. The antipathy of his sensibility to any play of the critical mind, the uncongeniality of intelligence to inspiration, these clearly go in Shelley, not merely with a capacity for momentary self-deceptions and insincerities, but with a radical lack of self-knowledge. He could say of Wordsworth, implying the opposite of himself, that

he never could
Fancy another situation
From which to dart his contemplation
Than that wherein he stood.

But, for all his altruistic fervours and his fancied capacity for projecting his sympathies, Shelley is habitually—it is no new observation—his own hero: Alastor, Laon, The Sensitive Plant

(It loves, even like Love, its deep heart is full,
It desires what it has not, the Beautiful)

and Prometheus. It is characteristic that he should say to the West Wind

A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed
One too like thee: tameless, and swift, and proud,

and conclude:

Be thou, Spirit fierce,
My spirit! Be thou me, impetuous one!

About the love of such a nature there is likely at the best to be a certain innocent selfishness. And it is with fervour that Shelley says, as he is always saying implicitly, 'I love Love.' Mr. Santayana acutely observes: 'In him, as in many people, too intense a need of loving excludes the capacity for intelligent sympathy.' Perhaps love generally has less in it of intelligent sympathy than the lover supposes, and is less determined by the object of love; but Shelley, we have seen, was, while on the one hand conscious of ardent altruism, on the other peculiarly weak in his hold on objects—peculiarly unable to realize them as existing in their own natures and their own right. His need of loving (in a sense that was not, perhaps, in the full focus of Mr. Santayana's intention) comes out in the erotic element that, as already remarked in these pages, the texture of the poetry pervasively exhibits. There is hardly any need to illustrate here the tender, caressing, voluptuous effects and suggestions of the favourite vocabulary and imagery. The consequences of the need, or 'love,' of loving, combined, as it was, with a notable lack of self-knowledge and a capacity for ecstatic idealizing, are classically extant in *Eipsyichidion*.

The love of loathing is, naturally, less conscious than the love of Love. It may fairly be said to involve a love of Hate, if not of hating: justification enough for putting it this way is provided by *The Cenci*, which exhibits a perverse luxury of insistence, not merely upon horror, but upon malignity. This work, of course, is commonly held to require noting as, in the general account of Shelley, a remarkable exception: his genius may be essentially lyrical, but he can, transcending limitations, write great drama. This estimate of *The Cenci* is certainly a remarkable instance of *vis inertiae*—of the power of conventional valuation to perpetuate itself, once established. For it takes no great discernment to see that *The Cenci* is very bad and that its badness is characteristic. Shelley, as usual, is the hero—here the heroine; his relation to Beatrice is of the same order as his relation to Alastor and Prometheus, and the usual vices should not be found more acceptable because of the show of drama.

Nor is this show the less significantly bad because Shelley doesn't know where it comes from—how he is contriving it. He says in his *Preface* that an idea suggested by Calderon is 'the only plagiarism which I have intentionally committed in the whole piece.' Actually, not only

is the 'whole piece' Shakespearian in inspiration (how peculiarly dubious an affair inspiration was apt to be for Shelley we have seen), it is full of particular echoes of Shakespeare—echoes protracted, confused and woolly; plagiarisms, that is, of the worst kind. This Shakespearianizing, general and particular is—and not the less so for its unconsciousness—quite damning. It means that Shelley's drama and tragedy do not grow out of any realized theme; there is nothing grasped at the core of the piece. Instead there is Beatrice-Shelley, in whose martyrdom the Count acts Jove—with more than Jovian gusto:

I do not feel as if I were a man,
But like a fiend appointed to chastise
The offences of some unremembered world.
My blood is running up and down my veins;
A fearful pleasure makes it prick and tingle:
I feel a giddy sickness of strange awe;
My heart is beating with an expectation
Of horrid joy.

The pathos is of corresponding corruptness. The habits that enable Shelley to be unconscious about this kind of indulgence enable him at the same time to turn it into tragic drama by virtue of an unconscious effort to be Shakespeare.

There are, of course, touches of Webster: Beatrice in the trial scene is commonly recognized to have borrowed an effect or two from the White Devil. But the Shakespearian promptings are everywhere, in some places almost ludicrously assorted, obvious and thick. For instance, Act III, Sc. ii starts (stage direction: 'Thunder and the sound of a storm') by being at line two obviously Lear. At line eight Othello comes in and carries on for ten lines; and he reasserts himself at line fifty. At line fifty-five Hamlet speaks. At line seventy-eight we get an effect from *Macbeth*, to be followed by many more in the next act, during which, after much borrowed suspense, the Count's murder is consummated.

The quality of the dramatic poetry and the relation between Shelley and Shakespeare must, for reasons of space, be represented—the example is a fair one—by a single brief passage (Act V, Sc. iv, l. 48):

O

My God! Can it be possible I have
To die so suddenly? So young to go
Under the obscure, cold, rotting, wormy ground!
To be nailed down into a narrow place;

To see no more sweet sunshine; hear no more
 Blithe voice of living thing; muse not again
 Upon familiar thoughts, sad, yet thus lost—
 How fearfull to be nothing! Or to be . . .
 What? Oh, where am I? Let me not go mad!
 Sweet Heaven, forgive weak thoughts! If there should be
 No God, no Heaven, no Earth in the void world;
 The wide, gray, lampless, deep, unpeopled world!

This patently recalls Claudio's speech in *Measure for Measure* (Act III, Sc. i):

Ay, but to die, and go we know not where;
 To lie in cold obstruction and to rot;
 This sensible warm motion to become
 A kneaded clod; and the delighted spirit
 To bathe in fiery floods, or to reside
 In thrilling region of thick-ribbed ice;
 To be imprisoned in the viewless winds,
 And blown with restless violence round about
 The pendent world; or to be worse than worst
 Of those that lawless and incertain thoughts
 Imagine howling:—'tis too horrible!
 The weariest and most loathed worldly life
 That age, ache, penury, and imprisonment
 Can lay on nature is a paradise
 To what we fear of death.

The juxtaposition is enough to expose the vague, generalizing externality of Shelley's rendering. Claudio's words spring from a vividly realized particular situation; from the imagined experience of a given mind in a given critical moment that is felt from the inside—that is lived—with sharp concrete particularity. Claudio's 'Ay, but to die . . .' is not insistently and voluminously emotional like Beatrice's ('wildly')

O

My God! Can it be possible . . .

but it is incomparably more intense. That 'cold obstruction' is not abstract; it gives rather the essence of the situation in which Claudio shrinkingly imagines himself—the sense of the warm body (given by 'cold') struggling ('obstruction' takes an appropriate effort to pronounce) in vain with the suffocating earth. Sentience, warmth and motion, the essentials of being alive as epitomized in the next line, recoil

from death, realized brutally in the concrete (the 'clod' is a vehement protest, as 'clay,' which 'kneaded' nevertheless brings appropriately in, would not have been). Sentience, in the 'delighted spirit,' plunges, not into the delightful coolness suggested by 'bathe,' but into the dreadful opposite, and warmth and motion shudder away from the icy prison ('reside' is analogous in working to 'bathe'). The shudder is there in 'thrilling,' which also—such alliteration as that of 'thrilling region' and 'thick-ribbed' is not accidental in a Shakespearian passage of this quality—gives the sharp reverberating report of the ice as, in the intense cold, it is forced up into ridges or ribs (at which, owing to the cracks, the thickness of the ice can be seen).

But there is no need to go on. The point has been sufficiently enforced that, though this vivid concreteness of realization lodged the passage in Shelley's mind, to become at the due moment 'inspiration,' the passage inspired is nothing but wordy emotional generality. It does not grasp and present anything, but merely makes large gestures towards the kind of effect deemed appropriate. We are told emphatically what the emotion is that we are to feel; emphasis and insistence serving instead of realization and advertising its default. The intrusion of the tag from Lear brings out the vague generality of that unconscious set at being Shakespeare which Shelley took for dramatic inspiration.

Inspection of *The Cenci*, then, confirms all the worst in the account of Shelley. Further confirmation would not need much seeking; but, returning to the fact of his genius, it is pleasanter, and more profitable, to recall what may be said by way of explaining how he should have been capable of the worst. His upbringing was against him. As Mr. Santayana says: 'Shelley seems hardly to have been brought up; he grew up in the nursery among his young sisters, at school among the rude boys, without any affectionate guidance, without imbibing any religious or social tradition.' Driven in on himself, he nourished the inner life of adolescence on the trashy fantasies and cheap excitements of the Terror school. The phase of serious tradition in which, in incipient maturity, he began to practise poetry was, in a subtler way, as unfavourable: Shelley needed no encouragement to cultivate spontaneity of emotion and poetical abeyance of thought. Then the state of the world at the time must, in its effect on a spirit of Shelley's sensitive humanity and idealizing bent, be allowed to account for a great deal—as the sonnet, *England in 1819*, so curiously intimates:

An old, mad, blind, despised, and dying king,—
 Princes, the dregs of their dull race, who flow
 Through public scorn,—mud from a muddy spring,—
 Rulers who neither see, nor feel, nor know,
 But leech-like to their fainting country cling,
 Till they drop, blind in blood, without a blow,—
 A people starved and stabbed in the untilled field,—
 An army, which liberticide and prey
 Makes as a two-edged sword to all who wield,—
 Golden and sanguine laws which tempt and slay;
 Religion Christless, Godless—a book sealed;
 A Senate,—Time's worst statute unrepealed,—
 Are graves, from which a glorious Phantom may
 Burst, to illumine our tempestuous day.

The contrast between the unusual strength (for Shelley) of the main body of the sonnet and the pathetic weakness of the final couplet is eloquent. Contemplation of the actual world being unendurable, Shelley devotes himself to the glorious Phantom that may (an oddly ironical stress results from the rime position) work a sudden miraculous change but is in any case as vague as Demogorgon and as unrelated to actuality—to which Shelley's Evil is correspondingly unrelated.

The strength of the sonnet, though unusual in kind for Shelley, is not of remarkably distinguished quality in itself; the kindred strength of *The Mask of Anarchy* is. Of this poem Professor Elton says:¹¹ 'There is a likeness in it to Blake's [gift] which has often been noticed; the same kind of anvil-stroke, and the same use of an awkward simplicity for the purposes of epigram.' The likeness to Blake is certainly there—much more of a likeness than would have seemed possible from the characteristic work. It lies, not in any assumed broadsheet naïveté or crudity such as the account cited might perhaps suggest, but in a rare emotional integrity and force, deriving from a clear, disinterested and mature vision.

When one fled past, a maniac maid,
 And her name was Hope, she said:
 But she looked more like Despair,
 And she cried out in the air:

'My father Time is weak and gray
 With waiting for a better day;
 See how idiot-like he stands,
 Fumbling with his palsied hands!

SHELLEY

He has had child after child,
And the dust of death is piled
Over every one but me—
Misery, oh, Misery!

Then she lay down in the street,
Right before the horses' feet,
Expecting, with a patient eye,
Murder, Fraud, and Anarchy.

These stanzas do not represent all the virtue of the poem, but they show its unusual purity and strength. In spite of 'Murder, Fraud, and Anarchy,' there is nothing of the usual Shelleyan emotionalism—no suspicion of indulgence, insistence, corrupt will or improper approach. The emotion seems to inhere in the vision communicated, the situation grasped: Shelley sees what is in front of him too clearly, and with too pure a pity and indignation, to have any regard for his emotions as such; the emotional value of what is presented asserts itself, or rather, does not need asserting. Had he used and developed his genius in the spirit of *The Mask of Anarchy* he would have been a much greater, and a much more readable, poet.

But *The Mask of Anarchy* is little more than a marginal throw-off, and gets perhaps too much stress in even so brief a distinguishing mention as this. The poetry in which Shelley's genius manifests itself characteristically, and for which he has his place in the English tradition, is much more closely related to his weaknesses. It would be perverse to end without recognizing that he achieved memorable things in modes of experience that were peculiarly congenial to the European mind in that phase of its history and are of permanent interest. The sensibility expressed in the *Ode to the West Wind* is much more disablingly limited than current valuation allows, but the consummate expression is rightly treasured. The Shelleyan confusion appears, perhaps, at its most poignant in *The Triumph of Life*, the late unfinished poem. This poem has been paralleled with the revised *Hyperion*, and it is certainly related by more than the *terza rima* to Dante. There is in it a profounder note of disenchantment than before, a new kind of desolation, and, in its questioning, a new and profoundly serious concern for reality:

... their might
Could not repress the mystery within,
And for the morn of truth they feigned, deep night

Caught them ere evening . . .

For in the battle Life and they did wage,
She remained conqueror . . .

'Whence camest thou? and whither goest thou?
How did thy course begin?' I said, 'and why?

Mine eyes are sick of this perpetual flow
Of people, and my heart sick of one sad thought—
Speak!

as one between desire and shame
Suspended, I said—If, as it doth seem,
Thou comest from the realm without a name

Into this valley of perpetual dream,
Show whence I came and where I am, and why—
Pass not away upon the passing stream.

But in spite of the earnest struggle to grasp something real, the sincere revulsion from personal dreams and fantasies, the poem itself is a drifting phantasmagoria—bewildering and bewildered. Vision opens into vision, dream unfolds within dream, and the visionary perspectives, like those of the imagery in the passage of *Mont Blanc*, shift elusively and are lost; and the failure to place the various phases or levels of visionary drift with reference to any grasped reality is the more significant because of the palpable effort. Nevertheless, *The Triumph of Life* is among the few things one can still read and go back to in Shelley when he has become, generally, 'almost unreadable.'

Shelley's part in the later notion of 'the poetical' has been sufficiently indicated. His handling of the medium assimilates him readily, as an influence, to the Spenserian-Miltonic line running through *Hyperion* to Tennyson. Milton is patently present in *Alastor*, the earliest truly Shelleyan poem; and *Adonais*—

Afar the melancholy thunder moaned,
Pale Ocean in unquiet slumber lay

—relates him as obviously to *Hyperion* as to *Lycidas*. Indeed, to compare the verse of *Hyperion*, where the Miltonic Grand Style is transmuted by the Spenserianizing Keats, with that of *Adonais* is to bring out the essential relation between the organ resonances of *Paradise Lost* and the pastoral melodizing¹² of *Lycidas*. Mellifluous mourning in *Adonais* is

a more fervent luxury than in *Lycidas*, and more declamatory ('Life like a dome of many-coloured glass'—the famous imagery is happily conscious of being impressive, but the impressiveness is for the spell-bound, for those sharing the simple happiness of intoxication); and it is, in the voluptuous self-absorption with which the medium enjoys itself, rather nearer to Tennyson.

But, as was virtually said in the discussion of imagery from the *Ode to the West Wind*, the Victorian poet with whom Shelley has some peculiar affinities is Swinburne.

NOTES

1. See the essay on Shelley in *Winds of Doctrine*.
2. *Verse and Prose from the Manuscripts of Percy Bysshe Shelley*. Edited by Sir John C. E. Shelley-Rolls, Bart., and Roger Ingpen.
3. See *Four Words* (now reprinted in *Words and Idioms*), by Logan Pearsall Smith.
4. *Letters and Journals*, ed. R. E. Prothero, vol iii, p. 405 (1900). (I am indebted for this quotation to Mr. F. W. Bateson's *English Poetry and the English Language*.)
5. 'His ideal of my future,—now entirely formed in conviction of my genius,—was that I should enter at college into the best society, take all the best prizes every year, and a double first to finish with; marry Lady Clara Vere de Vere; write poetry as good as Byron's, only pious; preach sermons as good as Bossuet's, only Protestant; be made, at forty, Bishop of Winchester, and at fifty, Primate of England.' *Praeterita*, vol. i, p. 340 (1886).
6. *Oxford Lectures on Poetry*, p. 167.
7. Poesy's unfailing river
Which through Albion winds forever
Lashing with melodious wave
Many a sacred Poet's grave . . .
Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills.
8. See, for instance, the poem beginning, 'That time is dead for ever, child.'
9. See the last stanza of 'Rarely, rarely comest thou.'
10. Cf. Senseless is the breast, and cold,
Which relenting love would fold;
Bloodless are the veins and chill
Which the pulse of pain did fill;
Every little living nerve
That from bitter words did swerve
Round the tortured lips and brow,
Are like sapless leaflets now,
Frozen upon December's brow.
Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills.

ENGLISH ROMANTIC POETS

11. *Survey of English Literature, 1780-1830*, Vol. II, p. 202.

12.

O Golden tongued Romance, with serene lute!
Fair plumed Syren, Queen of far-away!
Leave melodizing on this wintry day,
Shut up thine olden pages, and be mute:

Keats. *Sonnet: on sitting down to read King Lear once again.*

The Case of Shelley

THE CASE of Shelley requires us to come to grips with the problem posed by the decline of a first-rate reputation. It would be easier to discuss if it followed a more conventional formula; if, for example, it were true to say that Shelley was ignored in his lifetime, idolized by the Victorians, and not seriously attacked till the New Critics took him in hand. As a matter of fact, he was not ignored in his lifetime, and some extremely able depreciation of his poetry appeared in the Victorian era. The critics of the period 1814-1822 paid a surprising amount of attention to him, generally concurring in the verdict that he was a poet of great but misguided powers.¹ This attitude did not give way to one of complete approval, but continued to characterize much of the most respected criticism of the century down almost to its end. The classic statement of the position is perhaps that of Wordsworth, made only five years after Shelley's death: 'Shelley is one of the best *artists* of us all: I mean in workmanship of style.'² This is high praise from a man whose praise in such matters counts, but it is far from being unmixed praise. By saying *artist* rather than *poet*, and by emphasizing the word, Wordsworth meant to qualify: Shelley, he is saying, was a very able craftsman but he chose to write about the wrong things. Matthew Arnold and Leslie Stephen disagreed about the nature of Wordsworth's virtues but they were essentially in agreement as to the nature of Shelley's defects. Those defects, they said, were unreality and unsubstantiality. To Arnold, Shelley was a beautiful and *ineffectual* angel; to Stephen, Shelley's poetry was too often the rainbow-colored mist into which the stagnant

Originally printed in *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, LXVII (1952), pp. 589-608. Revised for this volume by the author and reprinted by permission of the Modern Language Association of America.

pool of Godwin's paradoxes had been transmuted.³ Poe, Melville, George Henry Lewes, Swinburne, and Francis Thompson were ardent Shelleyans, Browning an ardent Shelleyan who later admitted some qualifications. Lamb, Hazlitt, Carlyle, Kingsley, and Mark Twain were violent anti-Shelleyans; the admiration of Emerson, Tennyson, and William Morris was less than hearty.⁴ During this time, generally speaking, the objections to Shelley's subject-matter shade off from loathing to unexcited disapproval or to the mere recognition of a limitation; while at the same time the emotions roused by his personality can be seen generally changing from hatred to affection, or at least to respect. To the earliest critics Shelley was a monster of immorality and impiety; to the later (even to many who did not care much for his poetry) he was an angel, a pure unearthly spirit. And a remarkable paradox emerges: though respected critics continually reiterate their lack of full satisfaction with the subject-matter of Shelley's poems, it is conceded as a matter of course everywhere in England and America, long before the end of the century, that he is one of the greatest English poets.

But not quite like the others in that company. From the first appearance of Shelley's poems down at least to the year 1917 (and I can hardly have been the last to experience it) his poems had a unique power to intoxicate and to enthrall sensitive young men and women, to operate upon them with the force of a sudden conversion. And this power of conversion had unpleasant consequences. Many people, as the range of their literary experience widened, grew ashamed of the extravagance of their youthful discipleship and transferred their disgust to the poetry that had caused it. Others never did extend their range much but remained one-poet men all their lives. The Shelleyans have included an alarming number of crackpots, cranks, fanatics, and bores. A discouraging amount of the writing on Shelley at all periods has been polemical: violently for or violently against.

The more tidy experiential arrangement would be to give the entire summary of Shelley's reputation down to the present day before advancing any theory. But because we have already uncovered what appears to be a central, permanent, and legitimate cause of disagreement among critics of Shelley, I shall pause to dissect it out before going on to isolate others which seem to require historical explanations. In the power of Shelley's poetry to make conversions we have a clue to the paradox of the Victorian criticism. Shelley is a passionately religious poet. His theory of poetry, which he himself developed at length in his *Defence of Poetry*, identifies poetry with prophecy. As Arthur Clutton-

Brock pointed out, he has been misunderstood by many critics because, being violently unorthodox, he has always been read as a secular poet, not for what he is. No one would have complained of the unreality of his poetry or of its want of substance if his subject-matter, like Crashaw's, had been the Christian religion instead of that religion which he was always trying to discover and to express for himself.⁵ He believed literally that there is a spirit in Nature, and that Nature therefore is never a mere 'outward world.' When he invoked the breath of Autumn's being, he was not indulging in an empty figure. The breath ('spiritus') that he invoked was to him as real and as awful as the Holy Ghost was to Milton. He believed that this spirit works within the world as a soul contending with obstruction and striving to penetrate and transform the whole mass. He looked forward to that far-off day when the 'plastic stress' of this power shall have mastered the last resistance and have become all in all, when outward nature, which now suffers with man, shall have been redeemed with him. This is the faith of the prophet, the faith held by the authors of Isaiah and of the Revelation, though of course their theologies differed widely and fundamentally from Shelley's. Shelley's main passion as a poet was not, in the ordinary sense, to reform the world; it was to create an apocalypse of the world formed and realized by Intellectual Beauty or Love.⁶

I am sure that Clutton-Brock is right in insisting that the way to understand, perhaps even to be moved by, Shelley's alleged unsubstantiality and lack of intellectual content is to realize that he is a prophetic poet. I do not know that any one has yet pointed out that it is also the way to understand another quality of his poetry which people of the present day find even more troublesome: I mean his alleged unmanliness, what it is now the fashion to call his maudlin self-pity. Those who knew Shelley intimately (and they included some men of very masculine character) all testify to the manliness, cheerfulness, and courageousness of his private life. He seems, after he attained to maturity, to have been very much the kind of man who keeps his personal troubles to himself. Though I agree with Mr. T. S. Eliot that his letters are not very good reading, I find them after 1814 on the whole manly and not without qualities of shrewdness and humor. Some of his short lyric poems are personal, really do give utterance to a private sense of weakness and unhappiness, but they are fewer than is commonly supposed, and, so far as I can remember, *Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills* is the only one of them that he ever published. In most of his despondent verse it is the general and properly public woe of the *vates*,

the prophet, that is being expressed. For the prophet cannot merely rest in saying that the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea; having been overwhelmed with the loveliness of that vision, he must cry, 'How long, Lord?' Over against the ecstatic apocalypse, in every prophetic tradition, there stands the despondent psalm; over against the power of the divine afflatus, the weakness of uninspired humanity. 'Thou art the God of my *strength*,' says the Psalmist, 'why hast thou put me from thee? and why go I so *heavily* while the enemy oppresseth me?' And again, 'Why art thou so *heavy*, O my soul?' Shelley's psalm employs the same vocabulary to express the same situation: '... The impulse of thy *strength* ... O uncontrollable! A *heavy* weight of hours has chained and bowed ...'

No matter how unitarian critics may be in theory, practical criticism in the long run judges poetry for both aesthetic and moral value: or, to use Arnold's terminology, for 'felicity and perfection of diction and manner' and for 'truth and seriousness of substance and matter.' The standards for aesthetic value (as I shall say later) appear to be relative to the evaluating sensibility; those for moral value to be more nearly uniform from age to age. The total judgment, as Arnold says, 'strikes a balance.'⁷ But since there is no common denominator for the two kinds of value, the total judgment is a compromise. And not merely a compromise; it is always a *personal* compromise. Two critics may be in substantial agreement as to the amount of aesthetic and moral value in a given poem and yet may emerge with the opposed verdicts 'Good' and 'Bad' because they weight the two factors differently. In the long run, however, and generally speaking, criticism gives greater weight to aesthetic value in poetry than it does to moral value. Poets (Shelley is an example) who continue to be vigorously attacked for their subject-matter will go on being rated great poets as long as readers in general feel and testify to the 'felicity and perfection of their diction and manner.'

We have uncovered the problem of belief in poetry, always a troublesome one and peculiarly troublesome in the case of Shelley. For it is hard to see how one can read a prophetic poet without vivid feelings of some sort about the prophecy that is being made. The prophetic poet has a message and he believes passionately in it. He strains forward towards his apocalyptic vision; his perception of the world 'as it is' is affected by what he believes it may become. What are you going to do about a prophet whose poetic gifts you consider to be of the first order but whose prophecy strikes you as heretical or silly?

In such a case, no matter what test you set up, whether Arnold's 'truth and seriousness' or Eliot's that the view of life presented must be 'coherent, mature, and founded on the facts of experience,'⁸ different critics, and good critics too, are going to emerge with different answers. It is not merely that we cannot agree on what is true; we cannot even agree on what is respectable. There will always be serious and qualified critics, who, like Wordsworth and Arnold, will grant that Shelley was a great artist, but will condemn him for the ideas he has presented, the view of the world that inheres in his writings. But if that were the whole of the case against Shelley, there would be no reason for saying that his reputation is declining. We should merely have the same state of affairs that has existed from the beginning. There never was so complete and general an acceptance of Shelley's subject-matter as there apparently was, let us say, of Pope's. There has always been a numerous and respectable body of anti-Shelleyans, but until recently Shelley's reputation maintained itself against their strictures. And the reason is clear. So long as Shelley was widely recognized, both by those who liked his poetry and by those who did not, as one of the best artists of us all—or, to use Eliot's words, as having poetic gifts of the first order—attacks on the cogency of his thought would not have succeeded in damping his fame. Opposed to every Eliot who decried his thought would have been a Bradley or a C. S. Lewis to argue eloquently that Shelley's thought is coherent, mature, and founded on the facts of experience.⁹ And there would have been others to assert that even if Shelley's view of life is somewhat thin and unsubstantial, he offers, especially in his lyrics, such an over-plus of aesthetic value as to make up for the defect.

To return now to the survey. The period from about 1895 to 1920 marked the highest point of the tide of Shelley's reputation. The problem of belief became a great deal less troublesome. Two of the most distinguished practitioners of literature during that time, Hardy and Shaw, were out-and-out Shelleyans: men who not only respected Shelley's art but who also found his ideas congenial. Shaw's religion, in fact, was by his own confession derived in large part from Shelley, and it resembled Shelley's closely. Yeats in his first period was a committed Shelleyan, regarding *Prometheus Unbound* as 'a sacred book' and *A Defence of Poetry* as 'the profoundest essay on the foundation of poetry in English.'¹⁰ Some of the best academic critics of the time, for example, Bradley and Elton, wrote sympathetically and persuasively of the positive virtues of Shelley's poetry, without more qualification than is to be

expected in any serious and patient evaluation. The consensus of this late-Victorian or late-Romantic criticism was that Shelley's minor works were his major works; that admirable as his longer works may be, they show his limitations in a way that his lyrics do not; that Shelley was England's greatest lyric poet.

The rise of the New Humanists marked the turn of the tide. Paul Elmer More's essay on Shelley appeared in 1910, but it is my impression that the water-line did not begin visibly to retreat until the publication of Irving Babbitt's *Rousseau and Romanticism* in 1919. From that time to this the reputation of Shelley has continued steadily to ebb.

I wish I knew whether the assault of the New Humanists really had anything in common with that of the New Critics. I should rather guess that it had little more than the fact that T. S. Eliot was educated at Harvard in the prime of Irving Babbitt, and that Eliot admired the work of Paul Elmer More. The New Humanists were not practitioners of any literature except the literature of criticism; they were academics, and their attack was essentially moralistic. Though their standards of value were somewhat different from Arnold's, their methods were similar. The New Criticism is something very different. Like Wordsworth's prefaces, it is essentially the manifesto of a new idiom in poetry; it has its origin in the works of practitioners like Pound, Eliot, the later Yeats, Ransom, Tate, and Warren. It will be sufficient for the purposes of this paper to say that the New Humanists' attack on Shelley, though it was vigorously continued and has not yet ceased, soon merged with and became trifling in comparison with the attack of those younger contemporary practitioners of literature who devote themselves also to criticism, and of critics who followed their lead.

It is very important to realize that the present revolt from Shelley was not academic in origin, but was a revolt of practitioners of literature. It is not necessary to name the significant modern writers who are anti-Shelleyan; one had better save time and say that they all are. And the more significant modern academic criticism, as I have said, took its lead from the practitioners, and is remarkably like that of the practitioners. Brooks and Leavis are in substantial agreement on the subject of Shelley with Ransom, Tate, and Warren. Indeed, the central modern critical document on Shelley may be taken to be Leavis' essay in *Revaluation*.

Because modern criticism is so polemical, it is not easy to discover what it really wants to do with Shelley. One distinguished modern practitioner of whom I asked the question told me with warmth that he wished Shelley to be completely forgotten and as soon as possible; but

he added that he knew he was unfair. Another, whom I charged with disliking Shelley, replied, 'I like Shelley very much when he will behave himself.' The second statement is probably the more candid, and indicates a wish on the part of modern critics, not to eliminate Shelley utterly from the roll of English poets, but to reduce his stature, to turn him from a major into a minor poet. And they are not content, as the nineteenth century was, to rest their case for this depreciation on the truth and seriousness of his substance and matter. When Mr. Eliot invoked the Arnoldian formula, saying that he could 'only regret that Shelley did not live to put his poetic gifts, which were certainly of the first order, at the service of more tenable beliefs,' Dr. Leavis rebuked him rather sharply.¹¹ Modern critics repudiate the dualism of the nineteenth century and test all poetry by a unitary standard. They may be diametrically opposed in their basic positions, some asserting that the aesthetic value of a poem is a function of its moral and theological soundness, others that when the beliefs of a poet are properly ordered in a poem, the question of their truth or falsity outside the poem does not rise, but the practical result is the same. One no longer says that a man is a great artist but lacking in wisdom. To Dr. Leavis or Mr. Tate, Shelley is not a great artist dealing with an unfortunate subject-matter; he is a bungler, a bad craftsman, and *therefore* a bad poet. This, in spite of the confusing survivals of older oppositions that turn up in the New Criticism, is something new. Our survey of Shelley's reputation has given reason to suppose that a poet can withstand a good deal of attack on the soundness of his ideas so long as a majority of the people who read him find aesthetic value of a high order in his poetry. But if a majority of the people who read him get little aesthetic value from him, his reputation is certainly going to be scaled down.

So much for the historical material. The principle which I offer for ordering it is that of aesthetic relativism, which I shall elaborate in the following set of definitions.

Poetry may be generally defined as language that expresses the qualities of experience, in distinction from language that indicates its uses. If one wishes to define more closely, one must introduce historical factors, specifications of some poetry but not of all poetry.

Poetry expresses the qualities of experience in terms of given historic sensibilities. Each historic sensibility has an idiom completely expressive of it. It *needs* that idiom and struggles to attain it. The needs of our sensibility do not operate merely at the level of the literary imagination,

they are *interests* operating at the very lowest level of perception and shaping that largely inferential synthesis which we call 'the world as it is.'

The organization of sensibility is always changing or shifting. At given moments in history, for example at the turn of the eighteenth century and again in the third decade of the twentieth, this shift became remarkably accelerated.

The standards by which men evaluate poetry, when they actually do evaluate it personally and do not quote other people, are the definitions of their own sensibilities. In dealing with contemporary poetry, critics who are abreast of the shift strive to define the truly modern idiom and to facilitate its emergence; in dealing with poetry of the past, they judge in terms of the needs of their own sensibilities. When critics say that a poem is good, they usually mean that it meets the needs of their sensibilities; when they say that it is bad, that it does not.

The organization of modern sensibility can be characterized not unfairly by a metaphor of catastrophe. The present generation is a shipwrecked generation. It has come ashore on a desert island with very little baggage and with few tools. Life on this desert island is possible, but only as men are vigilant, strong, self-reliant, and courageous. Self-pity is dangerous. The most that can be hoped for is so little above bare survival that any person who reminds the men on the island of the easier life they enjoyed before the shipwreck, or who draws glowing pictures of a better day in store for the island in the far-distant future, will be roughly silenced. 'They ain't a thing you can do about it, so shut up.'¹² Men in this state cannot afford the display of much emotion; they must be wary, tight-lipped, 'tough-minded.'

When modern sensibility demands that poetry shall deal with the actual world, the phrase means something very different from what it meant one hundred and fifty years ago. To men now it means the world as it presents itself to average perception in a culture that has been thoroughly imbued with the positivistic temper. Modern sensibility meets the dilemma of belief by using a starkly positivistic perception of the world to adumbrate non-positivistic values. It is skeptical of all large syntheses based on faith, indeed of all large syntheses whatsoever. It wants no prophetic poetry, at least no poetry of millennial prophecy. It shuns commitments; if it makes them, it wants to know thoroughly what it is letting itself in for. It is very suspicious of pronounced rhythms in verse. It wants its poetry developed, not by explicit statement, and not by a flood of images each relevant at only one point, but by the developed image, a large image firmly held, displaying point after point

of relevancy. It dislikes metaphors within metaphors. Above all, it wants no simplification or purification of experience in the interests of alleged beauty or of an alleged higher truth. It insists that since the experience of the actual world is always a complex of the pleasant and the disgusting, of the beautiful and the ugly, of attraction and horror, poetry must hold the discordant elements together, not allow them to separate. Poetry must operate through Irony, Paradox, and Understatement.

Modern criticism maintains that by these standards Shelley is a bad poet. He is sentimental: that is, he calls for a greater display of emotion than the modern reader feels to be warranted by the occasion. He employs pronounced, intoxicating, hypnotic rhythms that seem to be trying to sweep the reader into hasty emotional commitments. He seldom uses a firmly held, developed image, but pours out a flood of images which one must grasp momentarily in one aspect and then release. He is fond of figures within figures. He imposes his will on the object of experience: he does not explore 'reality,' he flies away from it. He seldom takes a gross, palpable, near-at-hand object from the world of ordinary perception and holds it for contemplation: his gaze goes up to the sky, he starts with objects that are just on the verge of becoming invisible or inaudible or intangible and he strains away even from these. He exhibits dissociation of sensibility: though he is even too much aware of the disgusting, the ugly, the painful, and the horrible, he puts all the beauty into one poem and all the ugliness into another, or he sorts them out in different portions of the same poem. He luxuriates in emotion. He embarrasses the reader by representing himself as weak, frail, bowed, bleeding, fainting, and dying.

It must be sufficiently apparent that I consider Shelley a great poet. I do not, however, share the confident belief of many of my colleagues that the anti-Shelleyanism of the New Critics is a mere fad or fashion that will soon pass away. I lecture to a large group of undergraduates each year on Shelley, and I read a good many of the critical papers which they and my graduate students write on Shelley's poetry. It is clear to me that within fifty years practically everybody will be saying about Shelley what the New Critics are saying now. The disesteem of Shelley is going to become general, and it may continue for a century or more.¹³

So much of the judgment of Shelley as I have outlined above is a valid judgment. Modern criticism, after a remarkable acceleration in shift of sensibility, is engaged in establishing the autonomy of its own

idiom. Its worst enemy is the debased or effete Romantic idiom of our latter-day Shelleyans. Modern criticism is right in recognizing Shelley as the great central exemplar of the idiom and practice from which it must disengage itself. Even if it were to grant (as it ultimately will) that Shelley is a much abler poet than others with whom it is now classing him, it would still reject him. There is very little in Shelley's poetry that modern sensibility *needs*. One may put it more strongly: Shelley's poetry is poison for a modern craftsman.

The judgment of modern criticism on Shelley is in the main not only valid, it will remain valid within its own frame of reference. One should not say that it is *merely* the modern judgment of Shelley; it *is* the modern judgment of Shelley. The New Critics are doing just what all of us did in our day; if it seems radically different, it is only because there has been a great acceleration in shift of sensibility in the last thirty years. When the significant Shelley criticism of this age is collected, it will be Leavis' essay, or some essay like Leavis', that will be chosen, not anything I might write. My evaluation of Shelley (which is very different from Leavis') is already old-fashioned. The sort of thing I can do was done as well as it could be done almost forty years ago by Bradley, Clutton-Brock, and Elton.

But the judgment of modern criticism on Shelley, though valid and permanently valid, is not exclusively valid. It does not impair in the least the validity of the serious criticism that preceded it. And it will not prevent Shelley from returning to very high general esteem. I do not see how any one could read carefully the great critical essays on Shelley from Bagehot's in 1856 to Grierson's in 1946 and still predict that the history of Shelley's reputation will be like Cowley's. It will probably be much more like Pope's. Though the Romantics and the Victorians steadily depreciated Pope and even went so far as to call him no poet at all, they continued to accord him practically the status of a major poet by showing that they were unable to ignore and forget him. By shifting the area of their attention, they were even able to read him. Though they were repelled by the satires and the *Essay on Man*, they found they could enjoy *The Rape of the Lock*, *Eloisa to Abelard*, and the *Elegy to the Memory of an Unfortunate Lady*. Shelley will not be dropped from the academic curriculum, but he will probably occupy a less prominent place there than he now does, and he will be represented by different assignments. It will be possible, even in Shelley, to find some poems congenial to the modern temper. *Mont Blanc*, with its extended

image, will be preferred to the *Ode to a Skylark*. Dr. Leavis has also said a good word for *The Mask of Anarchy*. Mr. Eliot, whose pronouncements on Shelley since 1933 have been generally respectful, has high praise for *The Triumph of Life*.¹⁴

Are we then to conclude that whatever is right, that the experiential method merely describes the vicissitudes of reputation but never submits any critical practice to judgment? By no means. I believe that modern criticism is doing very well, but I think it could be improved and still remain true to itself.

I have no right to demand of those modern critics who are genuinely and thoughtfully absolutist that they accede to the views I am here setting forth. My views and theirs are radically incompatible. We must simply say to each other, 'Our disagreement is fundamental.' But I cannot escape the feeling that the majority of the New Critics are anything but consistent and clear-headed absolutists. It appears to me that they constantly make statements which indicate that the real cast of their thought is, like mine, subjective and experiential, and that therefore their absolutism is arbitrary and illogical. I do not think that many of them, if they forced themselves to think that far back, could tolerate the stark rationalism of the *a priori* position which they would see that their absolutism assumes. It appears to me that their absolutism is a prejudice; that it springs in part from the very human but unregenerate passion we all have for bullying other people, in larger part from not having recognized the fact that one can make real judgments without making absolute judgments; that a judgment may be firm, unqualified, and valid without being absolutely so.

Let me illustrate. An observer on the ground, standing at the right place, will announce that the track of a bomb falling from a plane is a parabola. If another person *standing at that same point* says it is something else, he is simply wrong. But if an observer *in the plane* says that the track is a straight line, he is not wrong. In relation to the plane the track is a straight line. This observer's report has the same standing as that of the first observer on the ground.

I sincerely believe that many of our modern critics would not only be more comfortable, they would be a good deal more persuasive on a basis of reasoned relativism than they are on their present basis of uneasy and dogmatic absolutism. A critic who changed his base would not have to alter his critical standards in the least. He would merely give up the attempt to identify—I am partly quoting, partly paraphrasing a recent pronouncement of Mr. T. S. Eliot¹⁵—what is best for his own time with

what is best universally and always; he would stop pretending to erect a theory good for all time upon his perception of what is needed for the present. It is a necessary and laudable task to show the limitations of Shelley's poetry by measuring it against modern sensibility. But (I should maintain) it is equally necessary and laudable to expose the limitations of modern sensibility by measuring it against Shelley's poetry.

I wish modern criticism to continue to judge literature firmly by modern standards, but if it could find ways to be less polemic, it would go down better with me, and I think it would read better a hundred years from now. It is true that our present-day critics are no more arrogant than Wordsworth and no more spiteful than Swinburne, but I should like Wordsworth's criticism better if he had not been so arrogant and Swinburne's better if he had not been so spiteful. The battle, though not over, is clearly won. Is it not possible now to relax, to be candid, to stop sneering and snarling? Is it not possible for the New Critics to admit a little *pietas*? Would it not be more seemly for critics who occupy prominent positions as professors of English to stop using the term 'professor' merely as one of abuse?

For it must be clear to any fair-minded observer that modern criticism of Shelley is not completely candid. The critics are still making a case. They are suppressing much that could be said for his poetry on their own grounds. They are practicing, and encouraging others to practice, a kind of reading of him which they would brand as superficial if applied to Donne or Yeats.

I wish modern criticism would spend less time in prescription and more in calm, patient, neutral description. Though our judgments of the value of Shelley's poems are bound to vary widely and unpredictably, all critics of all periods ought ideally to be able to *describe* his poems in the same way: ought to be able to say, 'The structure of thought of this poem is so-and-so,' or, 'The metaphors of this poem are such-and-such.' Actually, after a thorough-going shift in sensibility, critics manhandle and misread poems because, since they dislike them, they do not approach them with patience and good will.¹⁶ We can now see how clumsy and obtuse the Victorians often were in reading Pope: they speak glibly of the lack of distinction in his ideas without bothering to understand them, and they misread his figures. We cannot blame them for not liking Pope better, but it does seem as though they could have described him more accurately. Wordsworth says that you must love a poet before he will seem worthy of your love. It is so; and love is a thing that cannot be commanded. Respect, however, can, and respect

will go a long way. One can, and should, conclude that a poet is worthy of respect when one finds that a good many respectable critics have respected him and still do respect him. All accomplished poetry requires close reading and Shelley's is especially difficult. The danger the New Critics run is that of not taking Shelley seriously enough.

A critic who calls Shelley careless should be very careful to make sure he has understood him. It is true that Shelley is more careless than Wordsworth or Milton, but he is less careless than Keats or Shakespeare. Shelley appears to have been quite innocent of any instruction in English grammar: he writes just as he talked and his conversational tradition (Eton), though good, was not at all points identical with the formal written standard. Consequently his poetry anywhere may make the verb agree in number with the nearest noun rather than with the actual subject; like Byron he is capable of sentences that never conclude. His larger compositions show occasional patches that read like improvisations that he never went back to finish. But these sketchy or unfinished areas are generally peripheral; they seldom affect the main design. On the whole he deserved Wordsworth's tribute to his craftsmanship. What modern critics call carelessness in Shelley is more often the highly adroit and skilful writing of a kind of poetry which they do not understand because they do not like that kind of poetry.

The New Critics show a remarkable want of delicacy of touch in handling Shelley, and they too often misread the poems they condemn. The tactic of bringing up *Romeo and Juliet* to demolish *The Indian Serenade* is a good deal like training a sixteen-inch gun on a cat-boat. The poem was never meant to compete in that class. It is playful and extravagant; it is a dramatic poem; it follows a well-known convention. One is not to assume that the person speaking is really fainting or failing or dying or even that he thinks he is; he is a young man (an East-Indian young man, at that) singing a serenade. Faced with a witty seventeenth-century love-poem of extravagant compliment, the modern critic knows just how to handle it; faced with Romantic extravagance, he loses all lightness of touch and becomes priggish and solemn.

Or take Dr. Leavis' contention that Shelley's metaphors sprout other metaphors that are suggested merely by the *words* he has just used. 'What,' says he, referring to the opening lines of the second stanza of the *Ode to the West Wind*, 'are those "tangled boughs of Heaven and Ocean"?' They stand for nothing that Shelley could have pointed to in the scene before him; the "boughs," it is plain, have grown out of the "leaves" in the previous line . . . Because things cannot be given precise

and limited location by a gesture of the forefinger, it does not follow that they are non-existent. Clouds, it is true, have no visible means of support, but they are actually just as much subject to gravity as leaves are. If they 'hang' high in the heavens, forming a solid and relatively stationary canopy, it is because they are being held there by a tangle of sunbeams, air, and water vapor ('Ocean'). A critic who believes that it is bad poetic practice to cite transparent and diffused substances as parts of a visual image will undoubtedly find a great deal to object to in Shelley, for this is one of Shelley's favorite devices. But it is the old and familiar objection of vaporousness or 'abstraction,' not verbalism. That Shelley puts figures inside figures is certainly true. It may well be that in the debased Shelleyan tradition of the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth the secondary figures have only a verbal existence. I doubt if that ever happens with Shelley. At any rate, before I said so in any particular case, I should expect to have to approach him with good will and to spend as much time on the poem in question as I would on one by Donne or T. S. Eliot.

A final instance. Both Dr. Leavis and Mr. Tate have subjected 'When the lamp is shattered' to extended destructive analysis. Both have misread the basic figures of the poem. Dr. Leavis calls the first two lines a sentimental banality, an emotional *cliché*:

When the lamp is shattered
The light in the dust lies dead.

The figure, at least, is not a *cliché*; it is a brilliant one that I do not remember ever having seen in any other poem. Dr. Leavis must have read the second line as 'The light lies dead in the dust,' and have taken this to be a pretentious and ultimately dishonest way of stating the commonplace that light cannot survive its source. But Shelley has not inverted the word order: he wants the words to be read just as he wrote them. His figure (see the following one of the rainbow) deals with reflected or refracted light. In a room which is lighted by a lamp, some of the light of which you are aware comes directly from the lamp to your eye, some is reflected from walls, ceiling, and floor. The direct rays Shelley might have called 'the light in the lamp'; the reflected light he calls 'the light in the dust.' What he is saying is not something so obvious as that when the lamp is broken the light goes out; it is that when the lamp goes out, the walls and floor of the room don't go on shining with a luminescence of their own. The point of this appears in the

second stanza, where he applies the figure. The 'light in the lamp' is the love of the spirit, the 'light in the dust' is the love of the flesh. But when the light of the spirit goes out, the 'light in the dust' does *not* go out; it shines on with a mournful vitality of its own. Love goes, lust remains. When we come to 'heart' in the second stanza we see the reason for both the 'dust' and the 'lies dead' of the first. A heart *is* 'dust'; it could in literal fact 'lie dead.' When Shelley applies the expression figuratively to light, he is deliberately and purposefully anticipating. This is what Professor Wimsatt, in his useful analysis of the nature of Romantic imagery, has called the importation of the tenor into the vehicle.¹⁷

Mr. Tate¹⁸ confines his strictures to the last (the fourth) stanza of the poem, but that stanza cannot be discussed apart from the preceding one:

17

When hearts have once mingled
 Love first leaves the well-built nest;
 The weak one is singled
 To endure what it once possessed.
 O Lovel who bewailest
 The frailty of all things here,
 Why choose you the frailest
 For your cradle, your home and your bier?

25

Its passions will rock thee
 As the storms rock the ravens on high;
 Bright reason will mock thee,
 Like the sun from a wintry sky.
 From thy nest every rafter
 Will rot, and thine eagle home
 Leave thee naked to laughter,
 When leaves fall and cold winds come.

Mr. Tate identifies 'Its' of line 25 with 'Love's,' makes 'thee' a human lover (a woman), and says that the ravens in line 26 are eagles in line 30. It is quite certain, I think, that the antecedent of 'Its' is 'the frailest [heart]' of line 23, and 'thee' is Love. The poem is a bitter or ironic contrary to 'Music, when soft voices die,' which Shelley had written in the previous year. The 'argument' of the concluding stanza is that as soon as lovers have enjoyed each other, they always fall out of love, but unfortunately not at the same time. The weaker of the two (man or woman) goes on loving after the stronger has been released. This hopeless persistence of love on one side causes love generally to seem unreasonable and ridiculous. The ultimate tenor is stated only in the three

spaced terms: 'passions,' 'reason,' and 'laughter.' Lines 18-24 adopt and develop as vehicle the old conceit that when a man and a woman are in love, it is because the god of Love is nesting in their hearts;¹⁹ while in the concluding stanza, this conceit in turn becomes tenor to a vehicle of a nesting raven. Line 17 is the most troublesome of the poem, and perhaps should not be defended. Having committed himself, contrary to his general practice, to an elaborate extended figure, it may be thought that it was bad judgment on Shelley's part to lead into it by another heart figure which appears to be radically incompatible. The difficulty, I think, here as elsewhere in Shelley, is caused by telescoping of syntax. Lines 17-18, if one spelled out the mental connections one needs to make if one is to read the passage with the right tone, might run something like this: 'When hearts have once mingled [and separated again into the usual divided state which we express by calling them nests of the god of Love], Love first leaves the well-built nest.' The effect of the syntactical fusion on me, at least, is to reduce line 17 to the status of dead metaphor or ironic *cliché*, which is perhaps just what was intended: 'When hearts have once mingled [as one reads in sentimental poems, including my own].' But past that snag, the rest seems to me reasonably clear sailing. The poet addresses the god of Love: 'You are always complaining about human frailty, but if what you want is stability, why do you choose the frailer of two hearts to come to first and to linger in longest? You are supposed to be a noble creature, and your nest is supposed to be an eagle home; why, then, choose something much more like a raven's nest? [In Shelley's day the English raven commonly nested near the top of a tall tree; the golden eagle—the eagle *par excellence*—always built its nest on a cliff.] The passions of the frailer heart will rock you as rudely as the storm winds rock the ravens in their nest. Just as the raven, if it stays in the nest after the leaves fall, will be exposed to the bright cold sun and biting winds of winter, so, if you linger in the frail heart, you will be exposed to rational mockery and to laughter.' There are two parallel series of four terms each: on the one side, Love, frail heart, mocking reason, laughter; on the other, raven, nest in a deciduous tree, winter sun, cold winds. 'Eagle home' in line 30 I take to be bitterly ironic. Mr. Tate cites the 'confusion' of line 31: 'Are we to suppose that the other birds come by and mock the raven (eagle), or are we to shift the field of imagery and see "thee" as a woman?' This implies a rule that there shall never be any crossing-over of tenor into vehicle: extended similes must always run either *a, b, c, d* as *w, x, y, z*, or *a* as *w, b* as *x, c* as *y, d* as *z*. 'Laughter' in line 31 is

mere carelessness: the figure demands 'sun and wind.' That Shelley constantly flashes back and forth between tenor and vehicle is undoubted, but I should agree with Professor Wimsatt (who of course does not guarantee this particular instance) that such practice is not carelessness but a brilliant extension of poetic possibilities.

I am not under the illusion that I have gone very far towards proving 'When the lamp is shattered' to be a good poem. I have no conviction that if Dr. Leavis and Mr. Tate accepted my reading of it they would like it any better. I doubt whether any person of advanced modern sensibility can like it very much. But I should like to think that I could make any patient and candid modern reader agree that it is a respectable poem.

I do not expect to reverse the decline in Shelley's reputation, though I confidently predict that that decline will one day be reversed. I do own my hope of persuading some of our modern critics to extend their present very narrow choice of judgments. A mature and complete criticism needs more verdicts than stark 'Good' and 'Bad.' It needs to recognize degrees of goodness and badness. Particularly, it needs to be able to discriminate poems that have seldom or never been found good by any recorded serious set of standards—metaphysical, neo-classical, romantic, present-day—from poems that have been emphatically declared good by a long line of respectable critics. Evaluation that confines itself to the sharp delineation of the present perspective is no doubt our first need, but it is only half of criticism.

NOTES

1. See Newman I. White (ed.), *The Unextinguished Hearth* (Durham, N.C., 1938).

2. An oral judgment recorded by his biographer, Christopher Wordsworth, in 1827. See Markham L. Peacock, Jr. (ed.), *The Critical Opinions of William Wordsworth* (Baltimore, 1950), under *Shelley* and *Byron*.

3. Matthew Arnold, concluding paragraphs of 'Byron' and 'Shelley' in *Essays in Criticism, Second Series*; Sir Leslie Stephen, 'Godwin and Shelley,' in *Hours in a Library*. The judgments were first published in 1881 and 1879 respectively.

4. Most of this material is conveniently collected in Newman I. White's *Shelley* (New York, 1940), especially in II, 389-418.

5. Arthur Clutton-Brock, 'Introduction' to *The Poems of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Charles D. Locock (London, 1911), I, xi-xxii. My summary is in large part direct quotation.

6. A good deal of this is taken verbally from Andrew C. Bradley's 'Shelley's View of Poetry,' in *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (London, 1909), 152-153, and from the extension of that essay, 'Shelley and Arnold's Critique,' in *A Miscellany* (London, 1931), p. 149.

7. 'Byron,' in *Essays in Criticism, Second Series*.

8. Thomas S. Eliot, 'Shelley and Keats,' in *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism* (Cambridge, Mass., 1933), pp. 87-88.

9. Professor Lewis's essay 'Shelley, Dryden, and Mr. Eliot' is reprinted in the present volume.

10. 'The Philosophy of Shelley's Poetry' in *Ideas of Good and Evil* (London, 1903), pp. 91, 93, 110-111.

11. *The Use of Poetry* (see n. 8), p. 88; Frank R. Leavis, 'Shelley,' above, pp. 268-269.

12. Red to Wyman in Norman Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead*, Part II, Sec. 5.

13. I guessed when I made this prediction that the presently dominant organization of sensibility would have about as long a reign as the neo-classic and the Romantic, but the speed of our modern methods of communication is probably bringing major shifts of sensibility closer together. Though I had not sensed it, the students at Yale had already begun to react from strict or polemic New Criticism before I wrote the present essay (end of 1951). The best of them now approach Shelley with good will and write perceptive papers on him. Academic publication of books and articles on Shelley has recently been very active. But I do not yet see among our practitioners of literature the emergence of an idiom that would justify one in concluding that the anti-Shelleyan trend has really been reversed. Shelley is not going to lack for defenders, but the defenders will be mainly academic and the justifications largely historical.

14. 'Talk on Dante,' *Kenyon Review* (XIV, 1952), pp. 178-188. Mr. Donald Davie's essay in the present volume (first published in 1953) furnishes other choices.

15. Preface to Leone Vivante's *English Poetry and Its Contribution to Knowledge of a Creative Principle* (London, 1950).

16. 'Our "Neo-classic" age is repeating those feats of its predecessor which we least applaud. It is showing a fascinating versatility in travesty. And the poets of the "Romantic" period provide for it what Shakespeare, Milton and Donne were to the early eighteenth-century grammarians and emendators—effigies to be shot at because what they represent is no longer understood' (Ivor A. Richards, *Coleridge on Imagination*, London, 1950, p. 196).

17. William K. Wimsatt, 'The Structure of Romantic Nature Imagery,' reprinted in this volume, pp. 24 ff.

18. 'Understanding Modern Poetry,' in *On the Limits of Poetry* (New York, 1948), p. 126.

19. Mr. Tate approves of this conceit as it appears in Guido Guinizelli: 'Al cor gentil ripara sempre Amore / Come alla selva augello in la vedura' (*Ibid.*, p. 78).

Prometheus Unbound: The Premises and the Mythic Mode

ANY INTERPRETATION of *Prometheus Unbound* as a work of "poetic idealism" will necessarily be conditioned by a determination of the drama's area of reference, the level of reality at which it is enacted; and this in turn must be a function of what its protagonist represents. Certainly Prometheus is not Man, if we mean by that the mortal human race. Prometheus himself, avowedly the benefactor and savior of man (I. 817), specifically makes the distinction in an address to Asia after his liberation and reunion with her:

we will sit and talk of time and change,
As the world ebbs and flows, ourselves unchanged.
What can hide man from mutability? (III. iii. 23-25)

Unlike man and the world, Prometheus is, at least at this point, not only immortal but also immutable; and Shelley's insistence that only thought, or mind, is eternal demands that we assign Prometheus his role, not in a system of allegorical abstractions, but in Shelley's metaphysics of idealism. He must be whatever Shelley's philosophy provides for as eternal and immutable. Moreover, in Act I, after his torture by the Furies, consolation is brought him by Spirits that come from the Human Mind, attributes or powers of a state of existence necessarily distinct from Prometheus'; and therefore he cannot be the Human Mind. Later he prophesies that, Jupiter being dethroned, he

From *Shelley: A Critical Reading* (The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1971), pp. 255-261, 275-278; 291-305. Copyright © 1971 by The Johns Hopkins University Press. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

and Asia will be visited by the arts of the "human world," which are "mediators / Of that best worship, love, by [man] and us / Given and returned" (III. iii. 58-60).¹ Even the speech of Jupiter which is sometimes offered as evidence that Prometheus is the "soul of man" actually distinguishes him from that:

Rejoice! henceforth I am omnipotent.
 All else had been subdued to me; alone
 The soul of man, like an unextinguished fire,
 Yet burns towards heaven with fierce reproach, and doubt,
 And lamentation, and reluctant prayer,
 Hurling up insurrection. . . . (III. i. 3-8)

But this cannot apply to Prometheus, who has already retracted his curse; who now pities, not reproaches, and therefore seems to Jupiter (as he does to Earth) to have been subdued; and who never doubted Jupiter's falseness or offered him prayer, however reluctant. Jupiter's words describe his own relation to the "soul of man" in terms of what Shelley took to be the relation of the god of traditional theologies to his fearful but rebellious human worshippers, and this is precisely the relation into which Prometheus has forever refused to enter. Finally, although the freeing of Prometheus and his reunion with Asia are paralleled by the gradual, progressive improvement of man, there is, explicitly, a significant time lag between the two, as though the continuous process of the perfection of man is in delayed sympathy with the instantaneous restoration of Prometheus, or as though one occurred in time and the other outside it.

To assume, then, that Prometheus illustrates "that man as a soul is not only indestructible, but, through high will inspired by love, is creative," as J. A. Symonds mused; to fancy with Rossetti that he is "that faculty whereby man is man, not brute"; to call him, as Mary Shelley did, "the emblem of the human race" or "the prophetic soul of humanity" or "the mind of mankind" or the "potential state" of man "insofar as it is good," as other critics have speculated; even to lean on Shelley's description of Prometheus in his Preface as "the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and truest motives to the best and noblest ends"²—each of these falls short of the mark insofar as it assumes that the central subject of the drama is a mankind having autonomous reality and that Prometheus is a fictional abstraction of earthly man or of his faculties or ideals. All such interpretations allow for only one mode of existence

and neglect the fact that, within the totally inclusive realm of Being, Shelley's metaphysics provides for two: human minds and the One Mind. Or, rather, such interpretations postulate that Prometheus must be a fabricated abstraction drawn by the poet from a reality called "man," instead of postulating the conclusion Shelley's "intellectual system" arrives at—that what we call "real" men are time-bound portions of the One Mind and, with respect to that unitary reality, are illusory, being only the "different modifications" of it. Individual human minds are indeed a necessary part of the play, but their actions take place off-stage and are effected by sympathy with the Promethean drama; for the human revolution and the history of human perfection that were the subject of *The Revolt of Islam* have here been transposed to the level of total Existence, the metaphysical reality here named "Prometheus." As such, he is not a fiction abstracted from what exists, but Existence itself. Indeed, except for Demogorgon, Prometheus is the only reality actually present in the play, and it would be short of the truth even to say that the drama takes place *in* his mind; he *is* the One Mind. But the One Mind is not to be confused with unknowable Being, the One that embraces both the universe and the mysterious reality outside it—the One to which Adonais returns on his death, which is beyond the "outwall" of "boldest thoughts,"³ and to which, on one occasion, Shelley gave the partial name Intellectual Beauty. The limited domain of *Prometheus Unbound* is that unitary *mode* of Being that appears in thought-constituted existence.

According to Shelley's doctrine of Necessity, we have observed, the distinction between good and evil has relevance only to mind, for the Power that is exerted through the universe, not being mind and not having will, acts as it must according to the necessary causal succession. But mind, having will, can make possible the initiation of an evil succession by imposing on itself a fictitious authority. All such willful impositions Shelley called "tyranny," the chief agents of which are kings, priests, and "fathers" like Count Cenci because they claim the existence of an independent authority outside man's mind which dictates arbitrary systems of thought and action. These arbitrary and tyrannical codes are not real in the sense that the uniform processive patterns of Necessity are, but are fabricated by the mind, which then abdicates to these fictions its own powers and enslaves itself to its own creation:

He who taught man to vanquish whatsoever
 Can be between the cradle and the grave
 Crowned him the King of Life. Oh, vain endeavour!
 If on his own high will, a willing slave,
 He has enthroned the oppression and the oppressor.⁴

It is therefore "our will / That thus enchains us to permitted ill."⁵ At the heart of this ethical doctrine is the paradox of freedom, which Shelley understands to mean, not the freedom to make arbitrary and capricious choices, as though "the will has the power of refusing to be determined by the strongest motive,"⁶ but only freedom from tyranny, that is, from the artificial, mind-forged restraints that the mind allows itself to impose on itself. Man abandons his natural freedom when he "fabricates / The sword which stabs his peace" and "raiseth up / The tyrant whose delight is in his woe."⁷ But true freedom does not mean freedom from the fixed processes of Necessity, to which the mind must submit itself if it is to possess its own will; for this submission is "that sweet bondage which is Freedom's self," a "weakness" or "meekness" which is strength.⁸

In accordance with these concepts Shelley has represented in Jupiter all tyrannical evils and has identified him with the conventional God of the theists. But since tyrannic power is only an efficient fiction constituted of the mind's willful abdication of its own will, Jupiter has no real and independent existence in the sense that Mind or Power does. Tyrannic evil is a lapse of the Mind, its negative mode, its reflection in a distorting mirror, and is no more independent of Prometheus, the One Mind, than that. Just as Beatrice Cenci ultimately suspects that God is a fictional projection of her father, who exploits that fiction to justify his tyranny, so "God" was created by some "moon-struck sophist" upon "Watching the shade from his own soul upthrown / Fill Heaven and darken Earth":

The Form he saw and worshipped was his own,
 His likeness in the world's vast mirror shown.⁹

Consequently, although Jupiter appears in the drama as a god, he is not a being or an autonomous power, but only the dark shadow of Prometheus, an unnatural condition that mind wrongfully permits and can repeal by an act of will. "I gave all / He has," says Prometheus (I. 381-82), because Jupiter is only what Prometheus has resigned;

and any institutionalizing and reifying of these abdicated mental powers is, by definition, the creation of a tyranny which then demands fearful submission of the mind to its own fiction. Unlike the traditional Jupiter, who usurped the throne of the gods and was merely aided to this end by Prometheus, Shelley's Jupiter is actually enthroned by Prometheus, who gave him "wisdom, which is strength," and "clothed him with the dominion of wide Heaven" (II. iv. 44-46). Hence Prometheus can say to Jupiter, "O'er all things but thyself I gave thee power, / And my own will" (I. 273-74). Not only is Jupiter unable to govern the will of Prometheus, the One Mind; he is not even self-determining because he exists only through Prometheus' concession that he be, or, rather, because he is only an unnatural surrogate for Prometheus. He has no will simply because Prometheus has not resigned his own will to his fictional creation. It is for this reason that, upon being overcome, Jupiter leaves only a blank, a "void annihilation," and is "sunk, withdrawn, covered, drunk up / By thirsty nothing" (IV. 350-51); and Prometheus knows that when Jupiter's soul is cloven it will "Gape like a hell within" (I. 56).

When Prometheus, wishing to hear again his own evil curse against Jupiter, decides that it not be repeated by "aught resembling me" (I. 220), it is more than ideologically proper that he assigns the task of repeating it to Jupiter's Phantasm; for, although it is true that Jupiter and the now-repentant Prometheus are moral opposites, the audience is thus presented with the dramatic shock of observing the Phantasm of Jupiter in effect mindlessly cursing himself. But more is conveyed than merely the irony of the situation. The curse Prometheus had once spoken is admittedly an evil (I. 219) because it is an act of revenge, a countering of a wrong with another wrong; and if it is proper that it now be repeated by the shadow of him who is all evil, the implication is that when Prometheus first spoke it he was, in a very real sense, Jupiter. Milton Wilson has called attention to the striking similarities between Prometheus' description of the Phantasm about to repeat the curse and Prometheus' description of himself in the curse.¹⁰ In Jupiter's Phantasm, Prometheus sees

the curse on gestures proud and cold,
And looks of firm defiance, and calm hate,
And such despair as mocks itself with smiles; (I. 258-60)

and at once the Phantasm repeats Prometheus' original execration:

Fiend, I defy thee! with a calm, fixed mind,
 All that thou canst inflict I bid thee do;
 Foul Tyrant both of Gods and Human-kind. (I. 262-64)

Indeed, it is impossible to know whether the Phantasm reflects the real appearance of Jupiter or, like a good actor, has assumed the appearance Prometheus had when he originally spoke the curse against Jupiter. But it is necessary to go beyond Mr. Wilson's conclusions and to recognize this as the actual identification of the execrating Prometheus with Jupiter, the god he made in his image. Not only does the audience watch the Phantasm uttering Prometheus' curse against him of whom it is the phantom; it also observes Prometheus facing his own former self in Jupiter's ghost, since all of Jupiter's nature—pride, coldness, defiance, calm hatred, self-mocking despair—existed in Prometheus when he cursed his oppressor, although he has dispelled these evils from himself now that he no longer hates but pities. "I am changed," he says, "so that aught evil wish / Is dead within; . . . no memory [remains] / Of what is hate" (I. 70-72);¹¹ and it is for this reason that only his former self, the Phantasm of Jupiter, can repeat the curse. If Prometheus intends a bitter irony by causing Jupiter's Phantasm to utter the curse against Jupiter, there is also an irony he does not intend when he thinks he has not called up "aught resembling me." The difference between Prometheus and Jupiter's Phantasm is that between Prometheus and his former moral self.

Throughout the play, as we shall see, Jupiter is presented as only a cruel parody of Prometheus, and this relationship is repeatedly underscored in Act I, where he is treated as the distorted, mocking reflection of Prometheus. Although Panthea sees Prometheus as "firm, not proud" (I. 337), Jupiter's Phantasm, who himself shows "gestures proud," calls him "proud sufferer" (I. 245); and Prometheus, speaking "with a calm, fixed mind" when he uttered the curse, addressed Jupiter as "awful image of calm power" (I. 296), while the Phantasm, repeating the curse, looks cruel, "but calm and strong, / Like one who does, not suffers wrong" (I. 238-39). In one sense it is Jupiter who fills the world with his "malignant spirit" (I. 276), but in fact it is Prometheus, who, in hate, has imprecated on "me and mine . . . / The utmost torture of thy hate" (I. 278-79). Prometheus' struggle is really a contest within himself, and his reference to Jupiter's "self-torturing solitude" (I. 295) is, ironically, actually a description of his own state as, chained to the precipice, he endures "torture and solitude, / Scorn and despair" (I. 14-15).

Given that Jupiter is the privative mode of Prometheus, we can understand why Prometheus, addressing Jupiter, describes the universe as

those bright and rolling worlds
Which Thou and I alone of living things
Behold with sleepless eyes! (I. 2-4)

For if the universe is the mass of thought, then it has a continuous existence by virtue of being the unending perception by the One Mind—and by the negation of itself that the One Mind has permitted.¹² These alone, like Berkeley's God and unlike the human mind, never cease to perceive the thought that is the universe. But as the institutional reification of Prometheus' relinquished powers, Jupiter would have the One Mind bow in total submission and abandon itself entirely to the then self-determined institution. Therefore, were it not for Prometheus' "all-enduring will" to resist, the One Mind would be deprived of itself, abandoned entirely to its own negation; and the world that exists because it is perceived would have "vanished, like thin mist / Unrolled on the morning wind" (I. 116-17).¹³ Without mind there can be no thought, and thoughtlessness can be the "measure" only of a vacancy.

We have seen that Shelley conceives of the poet as not merely an assimilator of beautiful mythic forms: inasmuch as he is creative, he is a mythopoeist, not by inventing myths, but by reconstituting the imperfect ones that already exist. His creations are "beautiful and new, not because the portions of which they are composed had no previous existence in the mind of man or in nature," but because of "the whole produced by their combination." Virgil was not an imitator of Homer, Shelley wrote in an unused passage of the Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*; "the (ideal) conceptions had been new modelled within his mind, they had been born again."¹⁴ Indeed, just as Shelley held that all human minds are portions of the One Mind, so he believed that, because of the interconnection and interdependence of all poems, each is a fragment of, or partial movement toward, "that great poem, which all poets, like the co-operating thoughts of one great mind, have built up since the beginning of the world."¹⁵ Evidence of his respect for this position is to be found not only in his resort to traditional materials but even in his refraining from forging new links to regroup and

interrelate diverse myths; for his implicit assumption is that the true and beautiful relationships of wholeness already exist potentially in the qualities of the given materials, waiting to be properly drawn out. Consequently, he rather strictly confines himself to the inherent syntactical potentials, however minor or neglected they may be in the conventional myths, and his mythopoeic art lies especially in eliciting and exploiting these potentials to form new combinations.

Although the wife assigned to Prometheus by the traditional myth and by Aeschylus was the Oceanid Hesione, Shelley had authority in Herodotus for wedding him to Asia instead; and yet the substitution did not violate or sacrifice any of Hesione's characteristics, for according to Apollodorus, Hesiod, and other theogonists, Asia also was an Oceanid, born of Tethys and Oceanus. Shelley, therefore, could then invent two sisters for Asia—Panthea and Ione—and properly substitute them for Aeschylus' chorus of Oceanids. This mythologically legitimate substitution allows him to integrate into the body of his play what in Aeschylus is a dramatically separate group of commentators on the action, yet without losing the right to use Panthea and Ione as commentators. In addition, not only Asia's oceanic origin but also her quasi-geographic name, unlike Hesione's, opened the possibility of investing her with the character and symbolic values of the sea-born Aphrodite. Like the Oceanids, Aphrodite was born of the seminal sea; and, striking a mean between the Cytherean and the Cyprian waters whence, according to the two different traditions, Aphrodite arose, Shelley locates Asia's sea-birth near the land of her name, Asia Minor, and describes it in the conventional terms of that of Aphrodite Anadyomene:

The Nereids tell
That on the day when the clear hyaline
Was cloven at thy uprise, and thou didst stand
Within a veined shell, which floated on
Over the calm floor of the crystal sea,
Among the Egean isles, and by the shores
Which bear thy name; love . . .
Burst from thee. . . . (II. v. 20-28)

Similarly, at the apocalyptic climax of the play, when Asia undergoes a second spiritual birth and again radiates the light of love, she is borne to Prometheus, as she was brought ashore on her first birth, in the shell which is Venus' symbol, now transformed into a chariot which is an "ivory shell inlaid with crimson fire" (II. iv. 156-57).

Mary Shelley, of course, was right to call Asia "the same as Venus,"¹⁶ and Asia's Venus-like character is consistently sustained throughout the drama, for she is to perform a role somewhat like that of the Venus-Lady of *The Sensitive Plant*, who tends a garden like that of Adonis. The Platonic distinction between the heavenly and earthly Venuses customary in discussions of Shelley and justified by the plot of *Prince Athanase* seems quite beside the point here. Asia's nature is to radiate love, and her separation from Prometheus is the absence of love: "Most vain all hope but love; and thou art far, / Asia!" (I. 808-9). But there are no categories or levels of love in the poem, and Asia is the love divorced from the One Mind when it is enchained by its own dark tyrannical shadow, the love that can be reunited with the One Mind when it wills its own freedom. She is the ideal condition of Existence. But Existence, or the One Mind, is also the "living" spirit in that ideally it is the identity of perceiver and perception; and Shelley is everywhere inclined to conceive of life (in this ideal sense) and love—and light—as intimately related and nearly synonymous, animation being the luminous energy and joy of love. For example, Shelley writes of "one Spirit vast," the plastic force that "With life and love makes chaos ever new"; and Beatrice Cenci laments that she is cut off "from the only world I know, / From light, and life, and love."¹⁷ Even the reanimated spring vegetation, in "diffusing" its scent and color, is spending, "in love's delight, / The beauty and the joy" of its renewed vitality.¹⁸ Hence the love that Asia radiates "like the atmosphere / Of the sun's fire filling the living world" (II. v. 26-27) is also a life-giving power; and Shelley can remain consistent with his mythic *données* because Venus—Lucretius' *alma Venus*—is also the generative or sustaining spirit like Asia, the Venus-Lady of *The Sensitive Plant*, and the Venus Urania of *Adonais*. Just as flowers burst into bloom and grass sprang up at the touch of Aphrodite's feet when she first walked on the shores,¹⁹ so Asia's "footsteps pave the world / With loveliness" (II. i. 68-69), and her presence generates life in the barren Indian vale of her exile,

rugged once

And desolate and frozen . . . ;
 But now invested with fair flowers and herbs,
 And haunted by sweet airs and sounds, which flow
 Among the woods and waters, from the ether
 Of her transforming presence, which would fade
 If it were mingled not with thine [Prometheus']. (I. 827-33)

For life-love is as dependent upon Mind for its existence as Earth is, and presumably the spirits of Prometheus and Asia, despite their separation, remain related through the agency of Panthea and Ione. It is, then, in accord with Asia's Venus-role that in the lyric concluding Act II this "Lamp of Earth" and "Child of Light" be addressed as "Life of Life" (II. v. 48), the love which is the essence of life and therefore of Existence; and that Prometheus speak of once "drinking life" from Asia's "loved eyes" (I. 123), since love's power is traditionally located in the light of the eyes. We can take literally the belief of Shelley's Rosalind that "life was love" and can understand why it is more than merely high praise that in Lionel, who is modeled on Shelley himself, "love and life . . . were twins, / Born at one birth . . . children of one mother."²⁰

It is proper, therefore, that Asia make her first appearance in the drama at the opening of Act II with the very moment of the advent of the physico-spiritual spring, the moment of renovation made possible by the One Mind's retraction of the curse. For spring, and, more particularly, the month of April that introduces spring, was sacred to Venus as goddess of generation. The reanimating spring is a property of Asia's symbolic role as a condition of Mind; and because Venus was traditionally attended and prepared by the Hour (Hora) of spring,²¹ it is consonant with the general structure of the conventional myth that at the end of Act II Asia ascend from Demogorgon's realm in the chariot of that Hour who is a "young spirit" with "eyes of hope" (II. iv. 159-60) and that this same vernal Hour, "most desired" and "more loved and lovely / Than all thy sisters" (III. iii. 69-70), also be appointed to convey the destined renewal to the entire earth and to mortal man and so bring the Promethean action to its fulfillment.

To adopt the Aeschylean myth in this fashion, and yet to subvert it, is to accept the ideal potentialities of the Prometheus story and yet to reject, through irony, Aeschylus' formulation and interpretation of it. In other words, Shelley's conception of the difference between the potential Prometheus and the received myth is of a piece with his view of the difference between the life and doctrines of Christ and the Church's perversion of them for the purpose of fabricating an institutional religion presided over by a tyrannical and arbitrary deity. Consequently, just as the first three acts both echo and transform *Prometheus Bound*, one major stratum of the first act and some passages else-

where derive in similar fashion from Scripture. Even apart from those moments when the life and figure of Christ enter into the main events of the first two acts, muted adaptations of Scripture sporadically renew the quasi-Biblical tone. The horrors brought about by Prometheus' enchainment, for example, tend to suggest the plagues visited upon the Egyptians for confining the Israelites in another kind of tyrannical bondage:

Lightning and Inundation vexed the plains;
Blue thistles bloomed in cities; foodless toads
Within voluptuous chambers panting crawled;²²
When Plague had fallen on man, and beast, and worm,
And Famine; and black blight on herb and tree. (I. 169-73)

Similarly, the miracle of Christ's walking on the waters, being one of those ideal orderings having "the power of attracting and assimilating to their own nature all other thoughts," can give perfect form to an expression of the spiritual effect of music:

And music lifted up the listening spirit²³
Until it walked, exempt from mortal care,
Godlike, o'er the clear billows of sweet sound, (II. iv. 77-79)

or to the ideal conclusion of Asia's backward journey over the symbolic waters from Age through Birth to a "diviner" region where "shapes . . . walk upon the sea, and chaunt melodiously!" (II. v. 108-10).

On the other hand, a scriptural phrase wrenched out of context not only rejects Christian theology but, readapted to a wholly different context, constitutes a contrary vision. Hence Asia, upon describing the creative use man has made of Prometheus' gifts, asks,

but who rains down
Evil, the immedicable plague, . . . while
Man looks on his creation like a God
And sees that it is glorious . . . ? (II. iv. 100-2)

For Shelley there is no supernatural Creator who looked on his creation and "saw that it was good"; in his homocentric theology only man's mind can be the source of the harmony and order that "create" the universe, the arts, and sciences. "All things exist," Shelley insisted, "as they are perceived—at least in relation to the percipient. The mind

is its own place, and of itself can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.'"²⁴ Nor is it the Christian God of the Apocalypse who dispels the first heaven and earth and sea to create a new heaven and a new earth.²⁵ In Shelley's concluding act this is exclusively the creative work of the powers of the human mind; indeed, while the Jehovah-like Jupiter existed, there could not be a heaven at all, so that the mind's powers must "build a new earth and sea, / And a heaven where yet heaven could never be" (IV. 164-65). At this seemingly apocalyptic moment at the end of the play, moreover, it is not God's angel who sets a seal upon the bottomless pit into which the serpent Satan has been cast and from which he will be loosed after a thousand years;²⁶ Shelley's serpent is not the supernatural power of evil, but the hieroglyphic serpent of temporal change, and its suppression is the work of the human powers of "Gentleness, Virtue, Wisdom, and Endurance,"

the seals of that most firm assurance
Which bars the pit over Destruction's strength;
And if, with infirm hand, Eternity,
Mother of many acts and hours, should free
The serpent that would clasp her with his length;
These are the spells by which to re-assume
An empire o'er the disentangled doom. (IV. 562-69)

But the primary function of the scriptural stratum of the play is to redefine and universalize Aeschylus' Prometheus by assimilating into his character both a modification of Milton's Satan and a strictly Shelleyan interpretation of Christ. In neither of these collations was Shelley especially original: the traditional Prometheus is clearly open to interpretation as either the suffering benefactor of mankind or the Satanic rebel against the Deity.²⁷ Only Shelley's brand of religion and ethics, however, could make possible the fusion of all three figures. As Shelley interpreted *Paradise Lost* in his *Defence of Poetry*, Milton subtly intended that we recognize his "Devil as a moral being . . . far superior to his God." Attributing to Milton his own abhorrence of explicitly didactic poetry, Shelley detected in Milton's having alleged "no superiority of moral virtue to his God over his Devil" not only a violation of "the popular creed" but also a "bold neglect of a direct moral purpose" that is "the most decisive proof of the supremacy of Milton's genius," presumably because it leaves the reader free, like the reader of *The Cenci*, to recognize with his own moral sympathies and antipathies that *Paradise Lost* "contains within itself a philosophi-

cal refutation of that system of which, by a strange and natural antithesis, it has been a chief popular support." In these terms, Milton's God, like Jupiter or Count Cenci, is a tyrant "who in the cold security of undoubted triumph inflicts the most horrible revenge upon his enemy, not from any mistaken notion of inducing him to repent of a perseverance in enmity but with the alleged design of exasperating him to deserve new torments." Satan shares with Milton's God the evils of "Implacable hate, patient cunning, and a sleepless refinement of device to inflict the extremest anguish" on his opponent, but these are venial evils in one who, like Beatrice Cenci, is subjected to enslaving torture, whereas they are indefensible in the unoppressed tyrant. Satan's moral magnificence lies in his perseverance in a "purpose which he has conceived to be excellent in spite of adversity and torture,"²⁸ and therefore, Shelley added in the Preface to his lyric drama, he shares with Prometheus "courage, and majesty, and firm and patient opposition to omnipotent force." But Prometheus is the "more poetical character" because, unlike Satan, "he is susceptible of being described as exempt from the taints of ambition, envy, revenge, and a desire for personal aggrandisement." Satan therefore engenders in us the "pernicious casuistry" of seeking to justify the evil in the light of his unjustified oppression and is the model for a tragic Beatrice Cenci, who sought revenge to maintain her own dignity and the repute of her family.

Such a reading of *Paradise Lost* leaves Shelley free to identify Milton's God with tyrannic Jupiter and either to evoke Satan in Prometheus before the curse is retracted or to imply a purified Satan in Prometheus thereafter. The Prometheus who, "with a calm, fixed mind," defied Jupiter and all he could inflict (I. 262-63) is recognizable as the Satan who, with "fixt mind / And high disdain, from sense of injur'd merit," defied "what the Potent Victor in his rage / Can else inflict";²⁹ and Prometheus' curse on Jupiter,

Heap on thy soul, by virtue of this Curse,
Ill deeds; then be thou damned, beholding good, (I. 292-93)

being evil, echoes by an ironic inversion God's punishment of Satan:

That with reiterated crimes he might
Heap on himself damnation, while he sought
Evil to others, and enrag'd might see
How all his malice serv'd but to bring forth
Infinite goodness.³⁰

Both Prometheus and Satan refuse "To bow and sue for grace / With suppliant knee, and deify [the Deity's] power";³¹ and Prometheus' determination,

Submission thou dost know I cannot try.
For what submission but that fatal word. . . .
. . . Which yet I will not yield, (I. 395-400)

asks us to recall Satan's refusal,

. . . is there no place
Left for Repentance, none for Pardon left?
None left but by submission; and that word
Disdain forbids me. . . .³²

But Shelley's transformation of Milton's Satan and assimilation of him into Prometheus does not rest merely on verbal parallels, which primarily call upon the reader to be aware of how broadly Prometheus' role is Satan's and how heroic is their resistance to a tyrannical deity. The shock lies not only in Shelley's construction of a Satanic hero but also in the fact that the Prometheus who is the unrelenting Satanic rebel against God is also the mild and suffering Christ—but a Christ whom Shelley has purified from the perversions of Scripture.

Just as Shelley's Prometheus has transmitted wisdom and power to a fictional Jupiter who, requiting good with evil, has turned these virtuous gifts against Prometheus and man, so, in Shelley's view, institutional Christianity has appropriated the virtuous life and doctrines of Christ and, by identifying them with a terrible and dictatorial God, has turned them into a despotism. Evil minds change good to their own nature and recompense virtuous gifts by enchaining the donor.

The sublime human character of Jesus Christ was deformed by an imputed identification with a Power, who tempted, betrayed, and punished the innocent beings who were called into existence by His sole will; and for the period of a thousand years, the spirit of this most just, wise, and benevolent of men has been propitiated with myriads of hecatombs of those who approached the nearest to His innocence and wisdom, sacrificed under every aggravation of atrocity and variety of torture.³³

"The wise, the mild, the lofty, and the just," Prometheus says to the image of Christ, "thy slaves hate for being like to thee" (I. 605-6);

but the relation he is drawing between Christ and enslaved Christians is also that between himself and Jupiter, who, when Prometheus cursed him, "trembled like a slave" (II. iv. 108). By identifying Christ with a hypothetically transcendent and punitive God, the Church transformed good into evil and became its slave, hating the good it had transformed; by accepting Prometheus' virtuous gifts of mental powers and transforming them into instruments of vengeance and suppression, Jupiter has become their slave, hating both the virtuous Titan from whom he received them and the race of mankind which is "like" the Titan. Both Jupiter and organized Christianity, the great tyrants, are slaves because "All spirits are enslaved which serve things evil" (II. iv. 110).

On the basis of these analogies Shelley's first act elaborately identifies Prometheus with Christ, and throughout the drama institutional Christianity is repudiated by being ironically inverted, as Shelley has inverted the Prometheus myth of Aeschylus. The syncretic assimilation of Christ (and Satan) to Prometheus obliterates the specificity of the two myths to form the archetypal pattern, and although Christ is vividly recognizable by his description, nowhere is he specifically named, not only because "Thy name I will not speak, / It hath become a curse" (I. 603-4), but also because it would limit his reference. Prometheus absorbs Christ, as he does Satan, because they are manifestations of the same pattern of truth, and when he is forced by the Furies to look at the figure of Christ on the Cross he is really seeing himself. "Nailed" to the rock (I. 20) and pierced by the "spears"⁸⁴ of the glaciers (I. 31), Prometheus is in the posture of the crucified Christ. Shelley's hero is the identity of both these preeminent types of superhuman and self-sacrificing resistance to evil, although it is part of the bitter irony of the inverted Christianity throughout the play that Shelley means the Jupiter who has crucified Prometheus to represent the God of whom the New Testament Christ is the incarnate son, and for whose redemption of man Christ endured the Crucifixion. Like the Christ he is, Prometheus "would fain / Be what it is my destiny to be, / The saviour and the strength of suffering man" (I. 815-17)—but again with the crucial difference that he would save man, not from the sinful consequences of violating God's injunctions, but from the mind-projected "god" who would tyrannize over man and crush his independent spirit. For Shelley has formed Jupiter with affinities with the jealous Old Testament God of vengeance; and it is for the purpose of an intentionally shocking repudiation of this God that Shelley has

reinterpreted the opening of Genesis to fashion Prometheus' malediction:

Let thy malignant spirit move
In darkness over those I love.³⁵ (I. 276-77)

The violent cosmic disorders that, according to Aeschylus, were wrought by Jupiter because of Prometheus' defiance³⁶ and the corresponding disruptions of nature that accompanied Christ's crucifixion easily lend themselves to Shelley's syncretic mythopoeia and its thematic motive. As the Crucifixion was attended by earthquake and the rending of rocks,³⁷ Prometheus' curse against his tyrant-god and his crucifixion on the mountain, according to Shelley, "made rock / The orb'd world" (I. 68-69) and brought tempest, earthquake, and volcanic eruptions (I. 166-68). The darkness at noon during the Crucifixion³⁸ is represented by the "Darkness o'er the day like blood" (I. 102) attending Prometheus' utterance of his curse. And it is likely that the immediately preceding description of the air's "still realm" torn by the curse and covered with darkness when the rent closed (I. 100-3) parodies in volcanic imagery the scriptural account of the consequences of Christ's giving up the ghost. The irony lies in the fact that the received anagogical sense of the scriptural verse—"And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom"³⁹—is that by his sacrifice Christ opened a path into heaven. Mercury, sent by Jupiter to break Prometheus' will, is far less the threatening Hermes of Aeschylus than he is the Satan who tempted Christ by promising him all the kingdoms of the world "if thou wilt fall down and worship me";⁴⁰ for in return for bending "thy soul in prayer" to Jupiter, Mercury, unlike Aeschylus' Hermes, promises that Prometheus will "dwell among the Gods the while / Lapped in voluptuous joy" (I. 425-26). Whereas Christ refused because "it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve,"⁴¹ this is precisely the authoritarian God under the name of Jupiter whom Prometheus rightly refuses to worship or serve. Christ rejected the joys of the world; Prometheus, the pleasures of a putative heaven because he would not be one of its "self-despising slaves" (I. 429). Such a heaven, Mercury admits, "seems hell" by comparison with Prometheus' self-esteem and self-mastery (I. 358).

In the light of this recurrent and generally ironic syncretism of Aeschylus' myth with that of the New Testament, we can now recognize

that at the same time Shelley, as we have seen, empties of meaning the myth of Jupiter, Thetis, and their offspring, he also is mocking the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation. Not only has he, by elaborating the Jupiter myth, denied that tyranny can beget its own perpetuity, but, by fusing with the traditional myth Jupiter's expectation that his unbodied offspring will be incarnate in Demogorgon's (nonexistent) limbs, he simultaneously ridicules Christianity's belief that the god-head can be embodied (III. i. 18-24, 42-46); and no doubt Jupiter's announcement to his assembled gods, "Even now have I begotten a strange wonder, / That fatal child" (III. i. 18-19), parodies God's announcement to his assembled angels in *Paradise Lost* (V. 603-4), "This day I have begot whom I declare / My only Son."⁴² To Shelley Christ is the highest form of mind in the realm of existence, not the personification of Power; and therefore he is properly reflected in Prometheus, who is the One Mind and Existence. The error of Jupiter, the disfigured shadow of Mind, is not only his belief that he himself is Power; his is also Christianity's error of believing that its fictional creation is Power and that this Power can ever be incarnate as the Son in the realm of existence. In the context of such a mesh of falsehoods, such a Son could only be conceived of as "the terror of the earth" designated by Jupiter to "trample out" man's soul, not as its savior" (III. i. 19, 24).

Unquestionably, Panthea's dream-vision of Prometheus liberated and revealing his perfection is an elaborate assimilation of Christ's Transfiguration, which made his divinity manifest to the Apostles in a vision.⁴³ Just as Christ's Transfiguration strengthened the three Apostles in their faith and prefigured his future state of glory and that of man after the Resurrection, so Prometheus' transfiguration, revealed to Panthea in a dream and, through her, to Asia, both implants in the Oceanids the motive and the desired goal that, by the law of Necessity, will draw them along the causal sequence of their acts and foretells Prometheus' coming state of glory after Jupiter is removed and the Titan is reunited with Asia:

'tis He, arrayed
In the soft light of his own smiles, which spread
Like radiance from the cloud-surrounded moon.
Prometheus, it is thine! depart not yet!
Say not those smiles that we shall meet again
Within that bright pavilion which their beams
Shall build o'er the waste world? (II. i. 120-26)

During the night upon a high mountain the Apostles saw that Jesus' "face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light," the brilliance being the effulgence of the inner glory concealed beneath his human form.⁴⁴ Correspondingly, an apostolic Panthea reports that on the mountain height the

pale wound-worn limbs
Fell from Prometheus, and the azure night
Grew radiant with the glory of that form
Which lives unchanged within . . . , (II. i. 62-65)

and the simile likening Jesus' brilliance to the shining of the sun dominates Panthea's further description of Prometheus: love

from his soft and flowing limbs,
And passion-parted lips, and keen, faint eyes,
Steamed forth like vaporous fire; an atmosphere
Which wrapt me in its all-dissolving power,
As the warm ether of the morning sun
Wraps ere it drinks some cloud of wandering dew. . . .
And I was thus absorb'd, until it past,
And like the vapours when the sun sinks down,
Gathering again in drops upon the pines,
And tremulous as they, in the deep night
My being was condensed. . . .⁴⁵ (II. i. 73-86)

One detail of the Transfiguration scene of the New Testament, however, is significantly altered to strip away the theology and locate divinity in the One Mind, for Shelley could not well incorporate in his creation the bright cloud which "overshadowed" Christ in glory and from which the voice of God said, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." What Shelley is repudiating and what he is urging instead are made clear by his substitution: the "overpowering light" of Prometheus' "immortal shape was shadowed o'er / By love" (II. i. 71-73), an "atmosphere" that "Steamed forth like vaporous fire" and was the effluence of his inner sun-like glory. Shelley's deity is not the transcendent God of the bright cloud, but the overshadowing love that rises like a bright vapor from within Mind itself; and instead of God's acclamation of His beloved Son, the apostle Panthea hears Prometheus' voice calling on Asia, Generative Love.⁴⁶

In the context of these transformations of the life of Christ and their

absorption into the career of Prometheus we can understand more richly the dramatic function of the Spirits of the Human Mind at the end of Act I. The act is precisely balanced by the torturing Furies and Mercury the tempter on the one side and the consoling Spirits on the other, each acting on the soul of Prometheus. In accordance with the characteristic inverting irony of Shelley's drama, the Greek Furies, Zeus's agents who traditionally torture and punish evil, prove powerless to crush the virtuous Prometheus. Born of the "all-miscreative brain of Jove," the Furies are the products of the privative mode of the One Mind and are the dark impulses to evil that lurk in the "monster-teeming Hell" of the unconscious, like those that Beatrice Cenci eventually verbalizes into consciousness. Their purpose is Count Cenci's: to reduce their victim to despair, to self-contempt, and hence to the willful relinquishment of the will. Like the "undistinguishable mist" of repressed thoughts in Beatrice's mind which, "like shadow after shadow," darken each other, the Furies lurk beside Prometheus' soul, beneath his brain, and around his heart; and they have no shape but that which falls on them as a shadow of the anticipated agony of their victim—that is, they are unformed unless accepted into the conscious mind and become the operative character of that mind. Prometheus runs that risk of consciously acknowledging them by looking at them:

Methinks I grow like what I contemplate,
And laugh and stare in loathsome sympathy. (I. 450-51)

But, unlike Beatrice, he is "king" over himself and can "rule / The torturing and conflicting throngs within," suppressing them into the Hell of the unconscious from which they have come (I. 492-93).

Balanced against these Greek Furies, the Spirits of the Human Mind have a Christian ancestry. Making their flight from the human mind to console Prometheus after his torments by the Furies and temptations by Mercury, they perform the work of the angels who similarly "came and ministered" to Jesus in the wilderness after he overcame his temptation by Satan and who appeared to him "from heaven, strengthening him," at Gethsemane.⁴⁷ But if Shelley has transformed the Furies from potent ministers of justice into impotent agents of evil, he also rejected angels who descend from heaven: there is no transcendent deity that can arbitrarily choose to comfort the One Mind. Minds are their own spirits, their own divinity; and human minds, being the constitutive portions of the One Mind, are the only possible source of the powers

that can console Prometheus, even though they must fall short of the power of Asia, or Love.

The implicit equation of Prometheus with Christ becomes part of the drama of Act I in the chorus of Furies who taunt Prometheus with a history of Christianity that is also Promethean. Removing a veil, the Furies reveal to Prometheus burning cities and the despairing ghost of Christ bewailing the havoc for which he has been innocently responsible. The "gentle" Christ who once smiled on the "sanguine earth"⁴⁸ is described and his history recounted in terms equally applicable to Prometheus, bestower of knowledge on man, so that what the Furies are presenting to Prometheus is in effect a mirror image of himself. The similarity of the two saviors is drawn precisely: the knowledge the Titan gave man aroused a thirst that "outran" the waters of knowledge⁴⁹ and became the feverish thirst of "Hope, love, doubt, desire," which now consumes him (I. 542-45); Christ's words of "truth, peace, and pity" outlived him to become a poison that withered up these virtues, and the faith he kindled became a destructive conflagration until only the dim embers of faith remain and the virtuous survivors gather around them in dread (I. 546-59). Each virtuous gift became destructive of itself and those who received it. But of course this is the demonic version of the truth, designed to reduce Prometheus to despair, for the hope, love, doubt, and desire generated by insatiable thirst for knowledge are not evil. The Furies deceptively conceal the fact that man has been crushed, not by the gift of knowledge, but by the tyrannic use of knowledge and power by an anthropomorphic fiction, Jehovah-Jupiter; not by the words of Christ, but by the dogma of the Church into which they have been perverted. The purpose of the Furies in holding up before Prometheus an image of the crucified Christ is to persuade him of his futility because all who, like himself,

do endure
 Deep wrongs for man, and scorn, and chains, but heap
 Thousandfold torment on themselves and him. (I. 594-96)

But Prometheus will immediately undo the Furies' falsehood by acknowledging that it is Christ's "slaves"—that is, those who serve the institution that has perverted Christ's virtuous words into an evil, authoritarian Christianity—who hate the "wise, the mild, the lofty, and the just" precisely because these are Christ's virtuous disciples.

Moreover, by dramatizing the analogy between Christ and Prometheus, the Furies have so confused the two that they create a signifi-

cant ambiguity exactly like the ambiguity in Act I that makes the Phantasm of Jupiter the mirror image of Prometheus when he uttered the curse. Having revealed the ghost of Christ despairing amidst the ruined cities of men, the Furies add,

Past ages crowd on thee, but each one remembers,
And the future is dark, and the present is spread
Like a pillow of thorns for thy slumberless head. (I. 561-63)

The ambiguous reference is calculated: ostensibly the words are addressed to Prometheus, but the details derive from the picture of Christ that the Furies have just painted. Christ and Prometheus are in fact one; the two myths coincide, and there is no distinction between Christ's "thorn-wounded brow" (I. 598) and Prometheus' head on a pillow of thorns. Indeed, when the Furies now look at Prometheus after having tormented him with this vision of the tortured Christ, what they see in him is Christ in agony, whose "sweat was as it were great drops of blood":⁵⁰

Drops of bloody agony flow
From his white and quivering brow. (I. 564-65)

Appropriately, it is shortly after this echo of Christ's agony that the Spirits of the Human Mind will come to comfort Prometheus, just as the angel then strengthened Christ at Gethsemane. But it is a shocking irony that, with Prometheus brought to the height of his torture, one of the Furies appropriates the words with which Christ asked God's forgiveness of his crucifiers: "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Dispassionately the Fury, Maddalo-like, thrusts at Prometheus what would be the severest taunt of all if it were true—the necessary inadequacy of man's spiritual powers:

The good want power, but to weep barren tears.
The powerful goodness want: worse need for them.
The wise want love; and those who love want wisdom;
And all best things are thus confused to ill.
Many are strong and rich, and would be just,
But live among their suffering fellow-men
As if none felt: *they know not what they do.* (I. 625-31; *itals. added*)

By means of this transfer of Christ's words, Shelley denies the existence of the God whom Christ invoked, the supernatural anthropomorphic

deity who may arbitrarily exercise forgiveness or, "having called us out of nonexistence, and after inflicting on us the misery of the commission of error, should superadd that of the punishment and the privations consequent upon it."⁵¹ Nor can Shelley admit either that the present inadequacy of man is inherent in his nature or that his ignorance and other deficiencies are the objects of forgiveness. Instead, to Shelley the proper response is Prometheus': the Fury's words should torture because the deficiencies are inexcusable; those not tortured by them have resigned themselves to accepting the imperfections of man's spiritual nature, and they are the ones to be pitied: "I pity those they torture not" (I. 633). Christ's words, therefore, are not the grounds for supernatural pardon; they properly belong to the agents of evil, not to a redeemer.

Prometheus can recognize in Christ a mirror image of himself, not because there is some accidentally viable analogy between the two, but, we are to understand, because they are different expressions of a universal truth whose pattern is always the same: to promulgate virtue without the safeguard of love is to make that virtue available to tyranny, and tyranny will pervert that virtue into the means of evil despotism. This, then, is not only the history of Prometheus and Christ, as Shelley interprets them, but also that of the political state, the most immediate and burning example for Shelley being France during the Revolution and its aftermath. Consequently, Shelley's syncretic mythopoeia provides that Prometheus, tortured with a vision of himself in Christ, also have a vision of a nation, presumably France, rebelling against slavery, only to see in horror that it then impatiently becomes the victim of a tyranny like that of Christianity and Jupiter. Shelley's myth identifies the legend of Prometheus with both political history and the course of dogmatic religion because the law that governs moral events is necessarily one and subsumes its manifest modes in state and church, the two institutions in which Shelley consistently located tyranny. Prometheus, suffering in agony like the Christ whom he has looked on, is granted by the Furies what they tauntingly call "a little respite":

See a disenchanted nation
 Springs like day from desolation;
 To truth its state is dedicate,
 And Freedom leads it forth, her mate;
 A legioned band of linked brothers
 Whom Love calls children—. (I. 567-72)

The nation's moral awakening parallels Prometheus' arousing man from his vegetative, disenfranchised existence under Saturn by granting him wisdom, the birthright that had been denied (II. iv. 32-43). But another Fury breaks in to deny that this band is Love's children: "Tis another's." Because this accession to truth and freedom has not been bred by love, but only by impatient aspiration to truth, freedom, and equality, tyranny usurps these new powers as the evil instruments of a Reign of Terror, just as Christianity and Jupiter did:

See how kindred murder kin:
 'Tis the vintage-time for death and sin:
 Blood, like new wine, bubbles within:
 'Till Despair smothers

The struggling world, which slaves and tyrants win. (I. 573-77)

Or, as Prometheus will reconstruct the same vision:

Names are there, Nature's sacred watch-words, they
 Were borne aloft in bright emblazonry;
 The nations thronged around, and cried aloud,
 As with one voice, Truth, liberty, and love!
 Suddenly fierce confusion fell from heaven
 Among them: there was strife, deceit, and fear:
 Tyrants rushed in, and did divide the spoil.⁵² (I. 648-54)

Yet if we reconsider this process of myth-making, it is evident that Christ and Christianity are not in fact named or explicitly identified in the drama. True, it is explicit that a figure on a crucifix is displayed to Prometheus; and yet when Panthea reports to Ione that she has seen "a youth / With patient looks nailed to a crucifix" (I. 584-85), it is impossible to say unequivocally that she has seen anyone other than Prometheus, who is every patient crucified savior of man. Nor indeed is the French Revolution ever specified, even though the Furies are attempting to reduce Prometheus to the submissive hopelessness that beset those of Shelley's contemporaries who were disillusioned by its failure. The historical pattern Shelley has elaborated could equally well apply to his view of the history of Athens, Rome, Venice, or Padua.⁵³ In describing how contemporary Spain, for example, had moved from one tyranny into another, Shelley wrote that it has passed "through an ordeal severe in proportion to the wrongs and errors which it is kindled to erase";⁵⁴ and this might serve as well as the history of the French Revolution to explicate Prometheus' vision. True, it was

with respect to the French Revolution in particular that Shelley had said that "a nation of men who had been dupes and slaves for centuries were incapable of conducting themselves with the wisdom and tranquility of freemen so soon as some of their fetters were partially loosened."⁵⁵ But his reference is unlimited when he writes:

A Republic, however just in its principle and glorious in its object, would through violence and sudden change which must attend it, incur a great risk of being as rapid in its decline as in its growth. . . . A civil war, which might be engendered by the passions attending on this mode of reform, would confirm in the mass of the nation those military habits which have been already introduced by our tyrants, and with which liberty is incompatible. From the moment that a man is a soldier, he becomes a slave.⁵⁶

Prometheus Unbound is cast in universal, not special terms, and is formed by Shelley's vision of the entire history of man's inevitable movement toward equality and freedom, from ancient Greece to the glorious future. His conception of history having been shaped by the recent sporadic eruption of revolutions for freedom throughout Europe and America, he conceived of the French Revolution as but an event in that progress, and he recognized the development that resulted in the Reign of Terror and the despotism of Napoleon as the type of all that prevents revolution from becoming freedom. Through Prometheus' vision of the merely impatient rebellion against tyranny, Shelley is observing that in all of history the release of the good in any of its forms, whether virtue, wisdom, or freedom, will, unless it is safeguarded by love, become perverted into a self-oppressive and therefore self-destructive force, just as Christianity has subverted Christ's doctrine and as Jupiter has subjugated Prometheus with Prometheus' own gifts. True revolution is rebellion governed by patient suffering and by love and benevolence; rebellion alone grows into self-destructive civil war that reinstates with its own gains what it was designed to overthrow:

If there had never been war, there could never have been tyranny in the world; tyrants take advantage of the mechanical organization of armies to establish and defend their encroachments. . . . A sentiment of confidence in brute force and in a contempt of death and danger is considered as the highest virtue, when in truth, and however indispensable, they are merely the means and the instruments, highly capable of being perverted to destroy the cause they were assumed to promote.⁵⁷

However much the reader may be tempted to specify Shelley's references, the fact is that Shelley has consistently abstracted and syncretized archetypal patterns of religious and political history in the same manner that he has assimilated the forms or potential forms of various conventional myths by releasing them from their special particularities. Presented successively with archetypal visions of religious and political revolution, Prometheus has seen, by virtue of Shelley's myth-making processes, the two major expressions of his own inclusive archetypal history as the One Mind.

NOTES

1. Shelley regularly defines art as mediating between two different levels of reality. See *Ode to Liberty*, 249-53.

2. In fact, Shelley is not attempting to define his own Prometheus but is describing the potentialities in the abstract Prometheus of classical myth, or, as he has just said of Satan, the way in which the traditional character "is susceptible of being described."

3. *Hellas*, 768-75.

4. *Ode to Liberty*, 241-45.

5. *Julian and Maddalo*, 170-71.

6. *Queen Mab*, VI. 198n.

7. *Ibid.*, III. 199-202.

8. *Ibid.*, IX. 76; *Prometheus Unbound*, II. iii. 93-94.

9. *The Revolt of Islam*, 3244-48.

10. *Shelley's Later Poetry* (New York, 1959), pp. 63-64.

11. When Prometheus has heard the curse he once uttered, he repents, adding, "I wish no living thing to suffer pain" (I. 305). The reference is mainly to Jupiter, it is obvious, since the curse was directed against him; but it probably is significant that at this point in the manuscript Shelley originally added the following stage direction: "he [i.e. Prometheus] bends his head as in pain" (Zillman, p. 149n.).

12. This interpretation is not, of course, obviated by the fact that Prometheus' sleepless vision derives from *Prometheus Bound* 32, and Jupiter's, from the maxim that tyrants dare not sleep (in his manuscript Shelley first wrote of Jupiter, "for a tyrant seldom sleeps, / Thou never" [Zillman, p. 133n.]) and perhaps from the opening of *Iliad* ii, which Pope translated as "the ever-wakeful Eyes of Jove."

13. Again, the fact, but not its significance, derives from the plan of Aeschylus' Zeus to destroy the human race and replace it with another (*Prometheus Bound* 233-40).

14. Lawrence John Zillman, ed., *Shelley's Prometheus Unbound: A Variorum*

rum Edition (Seattle, Wash., 1959), p. 636, where "new" inaccurately reads "now."

15. *Defence of Poetry* (Julian, VII, 124).

16. Note to *Prometheus Unbound* (Julian, II, 269). No evidence, however, has been found to support her statement that this identification had been made by other mythologists; and her identification of Asia as "Nature" is not especially helpful, although that term does apply to the traditional Venus Genetrix.

17. *Ode to Liberty*, 88-89; *Cenci*, V. iv. 85-86.

18. *Adonais*, 170-71. See also *Queen Mab*, VIII. 108; "When Passion's Trance," 15; *The Magnetic Lady to Her Patient*, 21.

19. Hesiod *Theogony* 194; Lucretius i. 7ff. Compare *Adonais*, 208-16.

20. *Rosalind and Helen*, 765, 622-25.

21. For example, Pindar *Nemean* viii. 1; and *Homeric Hymn to Venus*.

22. Compare *Exod.* 8:3.

23. On seeing Jesus "walking on the sea," the disciples thought him a "spirit" (Matt. 14:26).

24. *Defence of Poetry* (Julian, VII, 137).

25. Rev. 21:1.

26. Rev. 20:1-3, 7.

27. See Raymond Trousson, *Le thème de Prométhée dans la littérature européenne* (Geneva, 1964). Both Alexander Ross (*Mystagogus poeticus* [London, 1647]) and d'Holbach (*Histoire critique de Jésus-Christ* [Amsterdam?, 1770?]), for example, had identified Prometheus with Christ.

28. *Defence of Poetry* (Julian, VII, 129-30). The same passage appears also in the *Essay on the Devil and Devils* (Julian, VII, 91). Godwin had elaborated a similar interpretation of Milton's Satan in *Political Justice*, ed. F. E. L. Priestley (Toronto, 1946), I, pp. 323-24.

29. *Paradise Lost*, I. 95-98.

30. *Paradise Lost*, I. 214-18. For this and other Miltonic echoes, see Frederick L. Jones, "Shelley and Milton," *SP*, 49 (1952), 500-4.

31. *Paradise Lost*, I. 111-12.

32. *Ibid.*, IV. 79-82.

33. *Hellas*, 1090-91n.

34. Cf. John 19:34.

35. Gen. 1:2: "and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters."

36. *Prometheus Bound* 992-96, 1014-19, 1043-50, 1080-90.

37. Matt. 27:51.

38. Matt. 27:45.

39. Matt. 27:51.

40. Matt. 4:8-9.

41. Matt. 4:10.

42. Cf. Ps. 2:7: "I will declare the decree: the Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee."

43. Matt. 17:9; or while they were "heavy with sleep" (Luke 9:32).

44. Matt. 17:1-6; Mark 9:1-8; Luke 9:28-36; II Pet. 1:16-18.

45. See also II. iv. 126-27: "Prometheus shall arise / Henceforth the sun of this rejoicing world."

46. II. i. 87-91. Later Asia's birth will also be described by Panthea in terms of a similar transfiguration:

love, like the atmosphere
Of the sun's fire filling the living world,
Burst from thee, and illumined earth and heaven.
(II. v. 26-28)

Since she is to be understood as the condition of Prometheus' being, when she is returned to her pristine nature during her night-journey of reunion with Prometheus, she will again undergo the same transfiguration (II. v. 11-20).

Leaning on Herschel's finding, Shelley assumed that the sun is not a burning body but is surrounded by a "shell as it were of phosphoric vapours, suspended many thousands miles in the atmosphere of that body." These vapors canopy the sun "as with a vault of ethereal splendour whose internal surface may perform the same office to the processes of vital and material action on the body of the sun, as its external one does on those of the planets" (*On the Devil and Devils* [Julian, VII, 102]).

47. Matt. 4:11; Mark 1:13; Luke 22:43.

48. According to Shelley, Christ sought to replace "the sanguinary Deity of the Jews" with "moral and humane" laws (*Letter to Lord Ellenborough* [Julian, V, 289]).

49. Ecclesiasticus 24:29: "They that eat me [Wisdom] shall yet hunger, and they that drink me, shall yet thirst."

50. Luke 22:44.

51. *Hellas*, 197n.

52. Compare *A Philosophical View of Reform* (Julian, VII, 5): "From the dissolution of the Roman Empire, that vast and successful scheme for the enslaving [of] the most civilized portion of mankind, to the epoch of the present year, have succeeded a series of schemes, on a smaller scale, operating to the same effect. Names borrowed from the life; and opinions of Jesus Christ were employed as symbols of domination and imposture; and a system of liberty and equality (for such was the system preached by that great Reformer) was perverted to support oppression.—Not his doctrines, for they are too simple and direct to be susceptible of such perversion—but the mere names. Such was the origin of the Catholic Church, which together with the several dynasties then beginning to consolidate themselves in Europe, means, being interpreted, a plan according to which the cunning and selfish few have employed the fears and hopes of the ignorant many to the establishment of their own power and the destruction of the real interests of all."

53. See *Ode to Liberty* and *Lines Written among the Euganean Hills*.

54. *A Philosophical View of Reform* (Julian, VII, 17).

55. Preface to *Revolt of Islam*.

56. *A Philosophical View of Reform* (Julian, VII, 41).

57. *Ibid.* (Julian, VII, 53-54).

Keats's Style: Evolution toward Qualities of Permanent Value

WITH the decline of neoclassicism, poetry was faced with some relatively new problems and a new uneasiness about its value and function. The problems and the uneasiness have persisted; and the principal ways of meeting them have not changed radically from those the greater romantics adopted. Whether we like our legacy or not, the present literary generation is very much the heir of the romantics.

On the other hand, of course, much of the poetry as well as critical effort of the last forty years has been written in a spirit of conscious protest against the idiom of romantic poetry. Some of the rather confused distinctions which this militant protest created at its start seem now to have become domesticated into academic orthodoxy, and we have begun to take them for granted, as we do most domestic phenomena, without any very searching revision of our first impressions. We especially follow the confusion of poetic form with mere idiom, and feel that we are describing or analyzing poetry according to the first when we are really thinking only of the latter. We hold academic symposia now on differences in the 'metaphysical,' 'Augustan,' 'romantic,' and 'modern modes'; and the word 'mode,' because it is open and fluid, gives us the feeling that we are being comprehensive. But it usually turns out to be restricted to special problems of metaphor, syntax, and phrasing. Like good Alexandrian rhetoricians, we have begun to play close to the ground.

No brief discussion of the style of a romantic poet can hope to improve

From *The Major English Romantic Poets: A Symposium in Reappraisal*, ed. Clarence D. Thorpe, Carlos Baker, and Bennett Weaver; © 1957 by Southern Illinois University Press, pp. 217-30. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

on the situation. There are, after all, genuine differences between the idiom of the romantics and the poetry of the last forty years; and some of them are quite fundamental. But any discussion that could make place for these acknowledged differences, and then subsume them within larger considerations would involve a more pluralistic, leisurely, less compartmentalized procedure that would permit us to review the total achievement of a poet. This is particularly the case with Keats. He has worn very well. He has continued to stir the imagination of poets and critics for a century and a half. On the other hand, the idiom of much of his earlier poetry is hardly at the present time a model or even much of an encouragement. Indeed, to a good many younger readers, some of it is not even very congenial. Of course the language of his greatest poetry has always held a magnetic attraction; for there we reach, if only for a brief while, a high plateau where in mastery of phrase he has few equals in English poetry, and only one obvious superior. A very important part of the more general significance of Keats is the fact that he was able to reach that level. But this, by itself, is not enough to explain the large, at times almost personal, relevance that we feel. He is a part of our literary conscience. Leaving aside the poignant appeal (and with it the sense of difference) of his own peculiar circumstances—the fact that he started with so little, the manner in which he struggled his way into poetry, his early death, and the like—we sense that this gifted young poet was working his way through problems that any honest poet of the last century and a half has faced.

Nothing less than a fairly capacious and imaginative consideration of his achievement, then, could get very far in capturing, or even beginning to suggest, the relevance of Keats's art to poetry since his death, and especially during the last generation. Still, the assigned purpose of this essay is to concentrate briefly on the stylistic character of Keats's poetry. Hard put to compartmentalize in this way, I should be forced to resort to the term 'honesty.' Certainly this is what now appeals to us most when we think of Keats as a whole, especially in the context of the letters. And we feel this impression confirmed in his stylistic development. Considering his short life, there is no parallel to the diversity of styles with which he experimented. Yet it was never experimentation for its own sake. The experimentation moves constantly toward great honesty—greater openness to concrete life and the claims of experience, toward greater fullness and richness of expression, and at the same time a growing strength of control and sensitivity to the formal claims of poetic art.

II

The early verse of Keats, down through the writing of *Isabella* (early in 1818), shows little selectivity of subject in either its themes or its imagery when it is measured by a really high standard. The impulse towards self-absorption in the object is associated with having the 'soul,' as he said, 'lost in pleasant smotherings.' It finds its outlet, that is, in a luxurious abandonment to the conventionally 'poetic' objects and images that intrigued a youthful romantic poet, and that Keats found ready at hand in the verse of his mentor, Leigh Hunt, and in the poets Hunt held up as a model. This sort of poetry, as it is developed by Hunt and the youthful Keats, and as it is continued throughout the poorer verse of the nineteenth century, is essentially a reaction, of course, against neo-classic conventions: an attempt to substitute for the stock themes and stock diction of the preceding century a conception of 'poetic' material even more confined, a diction equally liable to stereotype, and a versification—as Keats later learned—of equal monotony.

We need not retrace in any detail the characteristics of Keats's early diction and imagery: his use of *y*-ending adjectives ('sphery,' 'lawny,' 'bloomy,' 'surgy,' and the like); the unfortunate predilection for adverbs made from participles ('lingeringly,' 'dyingly,' 'cooingly'), and for abstract nouns that have little intellectual content ('languishment,' 'designments,' 'soft ravishment'); the use of such conventional props in his imagery as 'Pink robes, and wavy hair,' the 'silvery tears of April,' and monotonously recurring nymphs with 'downward' glances, the habitual appearance of objects with 'pillowy' softness, and the frequently embarrassing attempts to introduce action ('madly I kiss/The wooing arms') into this smothering world of rose-leaves, doves, 'almond vales,' and 'blooming plums/Ready to melt between an infant's gums.'

These characteristics and their sources have been frequently discussed, are familiar to every student of English poetry, and have little interest to present-day readers except as a steppingstone in Keats's chronological development. And they are accompanied not only by a lack of structural control but by a deliberately cultivated slackness of manner—except in his early sonnets, written in the Petrarchan form and employing diverse and not too effective structural peculiarities drawn from Hunt, occasionally Wordsworth, and the Miltonic imitators of the late eighteenth century. One is almost tempted to conclude that if Pope, in his versification, went in one direction and employed a device to

secure economy and tightness, then Hunt—and the youthful Keats—not only discarded it but, in some instances, deliberately adopted an opposite device. Examples of this would take us into the by-roads of prosody—particularly caesural-placing, where Keats followed Hunt very closely. It is perhaps enough to note how forcibly Keats, even more than Hunt, broke the couplet. In fact, when a pause is needed at the end of a line, he frequently put it at the end of the *first* line of the couplet, and then tried to run on the second line, without break, into the next couplet:

Full of sweet dreams, and health, and quiet breathing./
 Therefore, on every morrow, are we wreathing
 A flowery band to bind us to the earth,/
 Spite of despondence, of the inhuman dearth
 Of noble natures, of the gloomy days,/
 Of all the unhealthy and o'er-darken'd ways
 Made for our searching: yes, in spite of all,/
 Some shape of beauty moves away the pall
 From our dark spirits. Such the sun, the moon,/
 Trees old, and young, sprouting a shady boon
 For simple sheep

Endymion, 1, 4-15

The style of *Isabella*, written a few months after Keats became twenty-three, shows an embarrassed and confused attempt by Keats to rid himself of the influences of Hunt and of the 'sickening stuff' he later associated with Hunt's taste. 'I shall have,' he wrote, 'the Reputation of Hunt's elev  . His corrections and amputations will by the knowing ones be traced.' He had grown 'tired' of the 'slipshod' *Endymion*; his opinion of it was 'very low,' and he wanted to 'forget' it. Abandoning the loose, run-on couplet he had taken over from Hunt, Keats selected the tight ottava rima stanza (perhaps better fitted for satire, because of the snap of its concluding couplet); and though the story has limited possibilities, to say the least, and though there is still (as he himself was to say) a mawkish sentimentality of phrase and image, the versification shows an energetic struggle to impose a disciplined control.

III

It is during the year or more following the writing of *Isabella* that the maturer style of Keats developed so rapidly. Among the primary characteristics of this style is a suggestive power of image capable of securing from the reader an unusually intense emotional and imaginative

identification. This quality has become widely recognized in recent years, particularly since the implications of Keats's own conception of the poet's character, and of his puzzling term, 'Negative Capability,' have been discussed. We need not here make distinctions between the romantic theory of sympathetic identification, in which the poet takes on, through participation, the qualities and character of his object, and the more recent theory of *Einfühlung* (or empathy), with its suggestion that many of these qualities are merely the subjective creation of the poet or observer, and are bestowed upon the object rather than described in it. The poetry of Keats contains abundant examples that might be used to substantiate either, or both at once, as a guiding characteristic of his verse.

Certainly, in the verse written before *Hyperion*, a subjective element—more empathic than sympathetic—often characterizes this imaginative identification ('sweet peas, on *tiptoe* for a flight,' the foam crawling along the back of the wave with a 'wayward indolence'). But a more sympathetic in-feeling is equally apparent (minnows 'staying their wavy bodies 'gainst the stream,' lions with 'nervy tails,' or the organic in-feeling in 'Ere a lean bat could plump its wintry skin'). The verse from *Hyperion* through the great odes is replete with such imagery, ranging from 'The hare *limp'd trembling* through the frozen grass' to the agonies of the huge figures in *Hyperion*: 'horrors, portion'd to a giant nerve, / Of made Hyperion ache'; or

*through all his bulk an agony
Crept gradual, from the feet unto the crown,
Like a lithe serpent vast and muscular,
Making slow way, with head and neck convuls'd
From over strained might . . .*

(1, 259-63)

Such lines remind us of the passages in both Shakespeare and Milton that evoked so strong a sympathetic participation in Keats—as, for example, when he wrote in the margin beside *Paradise Lost*, IX, 179 ff., where Satan enters the serpent without arousing him from sleep:

Satan having entered the Serpent, and inform'd his brutal sense—might seem sufficient—but Milton goes on '*but his sleep disturbed not*. Whose spirit does not ache at the smothering and confinement . . . the '*waiting close?*' Whose head is not dizzy at the possible speculations of Satan in the serpent prison? No passage of poetry ever can give a greater pain of suffocation.

Or again there is his enthusiastic mention, in one of his letters (November 22, 1817), of Shakespeare's image of the sensitive retreat of a snail:

As the snail, whose tender horns being hit,
Shrinks back into his shelly cave with pain.

And we may recall Charles Cowden Clarke's story of Keats's reaction, while reading the *Faerie Queene* as a boy, to the phrase, 'sea-shouldering whales': as if raising himself against the pressure of the waves, 'he hoisted himself up, and looked burly and dominant. . . .'

This kinaesthetic gift of image, if one wishes to call it that, this organically felt participation, is further revealed in Keats's ability to bring into focus several diverse sense-impressions of an object, and—in transmuting them into a single image or series of images—present a more valid, rounded, and fully realized apperception. This unifying interplay of sense-impressions should not be confused with synaesthesia. Keats's imagery, to be sure, is perhaps as richly packed with examples of suggestive synaesthesia as any that can be found ('*fragrant* and enwreathed light,' 'pale and silver silence,' 'scarlet pain,' 'the *touch of scent*'), and Keats's use of it had more effect on the synaesthetic imagery of later English poetry than any other one model. But the really distinctive quality in Keats—and a quality his Victorian imitators rarely attained—is less the *substitution* than it is the *substantiation* of one sense by another in order to give, as it were, additional dimension and depth, as in 'the *moist scent* of flowers,' 'embalmèd darkness,' or in making incense tangibly 'soft' and visible:

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what *soft* incense *hangs* upon the boughs.

A further example is Keats's predilection for tactile qualities: his craving for touch ('Touch,' he wrote, 'has a memory'), and for a firm grasp of the concrete as it exists in space. Thus images directly or indirectly connected with the sense of taste are sustained and deepened, in their vitality, through associations with tactile and muscular response: the 'purple-stainèd mouth,' the nightingale singing of summer 'in *full-throated ease*,' or the closing stanza of the *Ode on Melancholy*, with its

aching Pleasure nigh,
Turning to poison while the *bee-mouth sips* . . .
Though seen of none save him whose *strenuous tongue*
Can *burst Joy's grape* against his *palate fine* . . .

This tactile strength gives a three-dimensional grasp to Keats's images. Perhaps the most notable instance is the famous 'wealth of *globed* peonies,' in the same ode: here the hand is virtually enclosing the peony, further assuring itself of the three-dimensional roundness.

There is, in short, a *centering* in Keats's imagery of the various qualities of an object into a single apperception; and as a result the object emerges as a totality with its several aspects resolved into a unified whole rather than delineated or suggested separately. The use of strong tactile associations that give a firmer hold, a more definitely felt outline, is one means by which this centering of impressions, into an amalgamated whole, is secured and anchored. His general amassing and condensing of sense-impressions is another. And the result is an imagery that is less 'synaesthetic,' in the ordinary sense, than it is a gifted illustration of what Hazlitt meant by 'gusto'—that is, a state in which the imagination, through sympathetic excitement, draws out and expresses the total character of its object. In this intense identification, the impressions made on one sense 'excite by affinity those of another'; the object is grasped as a vital whole. And accompanying this sympathetic gusto, with its resolving of diverse impressions into a unified and immediate experience, is a discerning ability to sense organic motion, with a vivid fellow-feeling, and as an unfolding and continuing process. One is reminded of Severn's account:

'a wave . . . billowing through a tree,' as he described the uplifting surge of air among swaying masses of chestnuts or oak foliage, or when, afar off, he heard the wind coming across woodlands. 'The tide! the tide!' he would cry delightedly, and spring on to some stile, or upon the bough of a wayside tree, and watch the passage of the wind upon the meadow grasses or young corn, not stirring till the flow of air was all around him, while an expression of rapture made his eyes gleam and his face glow.

IV

It is especially through a rapidly developed mastery of idiom and versification that Keats acquired the control of impact and the formal sense of structure that restrains the concrete richness of his mature verse and thus contributes to its massive and interwoven firmness. It is here that the powerful influence of Milton—against which he was later to react in some ways—had so salutary an effect, lifting him far beyond the weak and fitful devices with which he had tried to tighten his versification in

Isabella. The first *Hyperion*, begun a few months after *Isabella*, immediately reveals that no apprentice, at once so gifted and eager, ever sat at the feet of Milton; certainly none ever learned from Milton more quickly and with greater ultimate profit. To be sure, much that he took over consists merely of the obvious mannerisms that all Miltonic imitators have used. One example is the frequent use of the adjective in place of the adverb ('Shook *horrid* with such aspen malady,' 'Crept *gradual*, from the foot unto the crown'). And there are the 'Miltonic inversions' with which Keats later thought *Hyperion* was disfigured: the epithet after the noun ('omens drear,' 'palace bright,' 'metal sick'), and the verb before the subject ('Pale wox I,' 'There saw she direst strife'). But other devices less mannered and more generally helpful were adopted. Among them should be noted the Milton ellipsis ('still snuff'd the incense, teeming up / From man to the sun's God; yet unsecure'); a condensed asyndeton ('some also shouted; Some wept, some wail'd, all bow'd with reverence'); and a use of repetition more effective than the crude repetition that Keats had taken over from Fairfax in his attempt to tighten *Isabella*. In versification, Keats closely followed Milton, and acquired metrical qualities that were to remain as a strengthening support in his verse. Chief among these are an increased slowing and weighting of the line with spondees, and also the use of the majestic sixth-syllable caesura, which Keats alone among Milton's imitators seems to have had the ear to catch. A growing sense of stanzaic structure is apparent in the *Eve of St. Agnes*, which, in contrast to other eighteenth- and nineteenth-century poems in the Spenserian stanza, often preserves the quatrain division that Spenser himself used in the stanza (*abab bcbc c*). In his sonnets, Keats now abandoned the Petrarchan form, which had been the dominant sonnet form since Milton; and he went back instead to the Shakespearian rhyme scheme, consisting of three heroic, or elegiac, quatrains and a couplet. But the sonnet was now only an incidental and casual form for Keats. If his poetic temper was still mainly lyrical, it was becoming too richly weighted to be couched in the brief space of the sonnet. In fact, he not only wished for a more lengthy form, which would permit a more leisurely development, but he desired a different rhyme pattern. In the first eight lines of the Petrarchan form, the three couplets (*a bb aa bb a*), he felt, had a 'pouncing' quality, the second line of each couplet leaping out, as it were, to match the first. In the Shakespearian form, on the other hand, the three alternate-rhyming quatrains (the heroic, and in the eighteenth century the traditional 'elegiac' quatrain) often had an 'elegiac' languor as well; and the concluding couplet, with

which even Shakespeare had difficulty, 'has seldom a pleasing effect' (May 3, 1819). Keats wanted, therefore, 'a better sonnet stanza than we have,' and wrote an experimental sonnet, 'If by dull rhymes,' the theme of which is

Let us find out, if we must be constrained,
Sandals more interwoven and complete
To fit the naked foot of Poesy.

After experimenting in the *Ode to Psyche*, he finally developed a ten-line stanza (in the later ode, *To Autumn*, eleven lines). This stanza is essentially constructed from the *dissecta membra* of both sonnet forms, and was possibly influenced also by some of the ten-line ode-stanzas common in the eighteenth century. Avoiding the 'pouncing rhymes' of the Petrarchan octave, the continual alternate rhyming of the Shakespearian form, and its concluding couplet, this new ode-stanza—though there are variations—consists basically of one alternate-rhyming quatrain (*abab*) from the three that make up the Shakespearian sonnet, with the addition of something like the ordinary sestet (*cde cde*) of the Petrarchan form. And here, in these closely knit and restraining stanzas, Keats certainly achieved a lyrical form 'more interwoven and complete.' In the odes, moreover, may be seen a masterful use of the assonance and vowel-interplay, first employed in *Hyperion* and continued throughout the *Eve of St. Agnes* and many of the sonnets, with an intricacy hardly equalled in the history of English verse. Keats informed his friend, Benjamin Bailey, that he had a 'principle of melody in verse,' upon which he had his own motives, particularly in the management of open and close vowels:

Keats's theory was that the vowels should be . . . interchanged like differing notes in music, to prevent monotony . . . I well remember his telling me that, had he studied music, he had some notions of the combinations of sounds, by which he thought he could have done something as original as his poetry.

And when Keats turned to the writing of *Hyperion*, in the autumn of 1818, he began to make use of an elaborate patterning both of open and close vowels and also of assonance. This use of assonance and vowel-arrangement is extraordinarily complex at times, and cannot be described in any detail in this essay. A few examples of assonance patterning, however, may be cited:

¹ ² ³ ¹ ² ³
 And still she slept an azure-lidded sleep.
¹ ² ³ ¹ ² ³
 Nor let the beetle, nor the death-moth be.

Or, to take a somewhat more complicated example:

¹ ¹ ² ²
 And bid old Saturn take his throne again.
³ ⁴ ³ ⁴

Patterns of vowel repetition occur, in an even more complex manner, throughout series of more than one line, and easily substantiate Saintsbury's assertion that the deliberate and frequent use of assonance in English poetry starts with Keats.

v

With the great odes, we are probably at the apex of Keats's poetic art. A discussion of the relevance of Keats's stylistic craftsmanship to the present day could quite justifiably turn into simply an explication of one or two of these odes. But the procedure taken here, rightly or wrongly, has been to stress the rather rapid experimentation with styles, the interests that led to it, and some of the more general aspects of Keats's development in this series of experiments. Hence, there would be place for only the briefest explication; and considering the care with which the odes have been examined, especially in the last twenty years, a short impressionistic explication would be presumptuous. Nor could we get very far in discussing the form of these odes even in general terms unless we spent time in reminding ourselves of the underpart of the iceberg—of what was going on in the mind of Keats throughout the year before the great odes and especially the last two or three months of it.

But we can certainly note in these odes—especially the *Ode on a Grecian Urn* and the *Ode to a Nightingale*—what I can only call a successful intrusion of the dramatic. In each we are dealing with a miniature drama. In each the poet seeks at the start—in the *Ode to a Nightingale* shortly after the start—to identify himself with an object that can lift himself beyond a world of flux. In each there is a gradual disengagement, an inability to follow completely the implications of sympathetic

absorption, and a return back (implicit in the *Grecian Urn*, more obvious in the *Nightingale*) to the world of process and the claims of the human heart. So, a century later with Yeats, there may be the paeans to Byzantium; but the drama lies in the return back—the descent down the ladder, as in 'The Circus Animals' Desertion'—to the human condition, and the assertive, unstilled desires of the dying animal, from which 'all ladders start.' The structure of the odes cannot be considered apart from this drama. Nor can the massive richness and the courageous openness to the full concrete expression, be considered apart from the drama, especially at a time like the present when fear of the welter, the quick unpredictable decay or change of concrete life has so intimidated the imagination of writers. There is courage here, in this welcome of concrete amplitude by Keats; and the courage is not apart from the poetic art.

The poems of the summer and early autumn of 1819 add important nuances to the situation. The questioning, before the odes, of the value and function of poetry in such a world as we find ourselves becomes more articulate in the letters. Energetic changes in style and form follow. *Lamia* drops, for the time being, many of the stylistic qualities of Keats from *Hyperion* through the odes. We have now a fairly open allegory, in some ways impetuously ironic and mocking in tone, which had, he hoped, a new energy that would 'take hold of people in some way—give them either pleasant or unpleasant sensations.' As if in a deliberate attempt to put things at arm's length, he surprisingly reverts to the crisp heroic couplet (the 'rocking-horse' meter he had once shied away from) of Dryden and Pope, though with a vivid color all of his own. The couplet is not so closed as in Dryden or Pope; but there are many closer similarities of a minor prosodic nature. Whatever else may be said of *Lamia*, it treats the effect of a Circian enchantment upon the impressionable mind of a young man (Lycius) who is open to the appeal of a magic world, and who is unable to withstand reality when it is pointed out to him. This general theme is closely related to the style which Keats, within two months, has suddenly evolved in contrast to the odes.

But at the same time he has begun to disengage himself from this new style, and to turn to still another, though the fragmentary form of the *Fall of Hyperion*—the revised *Hyperion*—hardly shows it to advantage. For, leaving aside all the psychological difficulties of this impetuous period, he was dealing with a discarded fragment. Little can be said about the style of this recast and warmed-up fragment except about meter and idiom. Stripped of its original allegory, the poem indicts the

'dreamer' who makes poetry a means of escape from the concrete world. Keats strips the poem, too, of many of its Miltonic mannerisms. In the place of the grandeur of the first *Hyperion*, we have now a more mellow blank verse, Virgilian and half-pastoral in tone:

Still was more plenty than the fabled horn
Thrice emptied could pour forth, at banqueting
For Proserpine return'd to her own fields,
Where the white heifers low.

I, 35-38

When in mid-May the sickening East Wind
Shifts sudden to the South, the small warm rain
Melts out the frozen incense from all flowers.

I, 97-99

Despite the uncertainty of the poem as a whole, there is a relaxed, even confident, quietness in the opening hundred lines or so of this revision. This opening can be said to suggest a style unlike anything else in the nineteenth century: a style towards which Keats might well have moved—or through which he would have passed to something else—had he continued to write for a few more years. Meanwhile, Keats's last great poem—the ode *To Autumn*—is, of course, a return to the full and dense richness that characterized the great odes of the preceding May, but a richness now harmonized and lifted to a serenity quite unequalled elsewhere in romantic poetry.

VI

The range and variety of Keats's style are perhaps greater than can be found in other nineteenth-century English poets. This is a large tribute; the brevity of Keats's career makes it larger. This variety partly explains Keats's continued appeal despite changes of taste during the past century. Victorian poets, for example, could find in Keats a veritable treasure house of the qualities they valued. Even when the romantic emphasis on 'suggestiveness' in poetry—on qualities in poetry that will stimulate the imagination into a creative activity of its own—developed into a cult of subjective revery, with the poem serving merely as a backdrop to one's own personal mood, Keats, particularly in the early verse, could furnish the Victorians with as striking a precedent or model as Shelley. More specialized developments in Victorian poetry could find

in him an even better stimulus than Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, or Shelley. Among two such developments one may mention a tendency—as in Tennyson, or in a different and cruder way, Swinburne—to sacrifice metaphor and concentrated imagery almost completely in order to exploit the musical qualities of verse; and Keats, as was said earlier—though without sacrificing metaphor and image—offers as dexterous and skillful a use of sound, especially in assonance, as can be found in English verse since the beginning of the romantic era. Similarly, the pre-Raphaelites, with their interest in single pictures, and in their effort to string a poem about a set of hangings or tapestries, usually to the neglect of any organic development of the poem as a whole, could find in Keats better examples to imitate than in any other romantic. Because Keats's images often attain remarkable clarity, as well as the condensation and the suggestive magic that the pre-Raphaelites liked, his poetry, more than that of the other romantics, remained popular with the Imagists when they revolted against pre-Raphaelite vagueness.

In the shift in stylistic taste, of which the revival of metaphysical poetry was a symptom, Keats was left relatively unscathed during the general barrage directed at nineteenth-century poetry. One explanation is the tensely braced and formal tightness of his mature verse, particularly the odes, which is hard to match in other verse of the century. Another is a growing experimental use of disparates and of sketched, suggestive metaphor in his phrasing: 'branchèd thoughts, new grown'; lightning viewed as 'crooked strings of fire' that 'sing away the swollen clouds'; or the now famous cancelled stanza of the *Ode on Melancholy*:

Though you should build a bark of dead men's bones,
And rear a phantom gibbet for a mast,
Stitch creeds together for a sail, with groans
To fill it out, blood stained and aghast;
Although your rudder be a dragon's tail
Long sever'd, yet still hard with agony . . .

This active associative suggestion through compressed metaphor, when joined with an emphatic in-feeling that is comparatively weaker in metaphysical poetry, provides us with an idiom that at its best approximates that of Shakespeare. The combination, at least, is rare since Shakespeare.

The point is the variety, and a variety that consists not only in a successive series of styles but also in the diverse appeal of formal and stylistic qualities that are coalesced in the greatest poetry of Keats. It

has stood him very well throughout some rather serious changes in stylistic taste during the past century, and throughout the growing, self-conscious fastidiousness that Johnson describes as 'elegance refined into impatience.' It is possible that what we think of as current tastes in poetry may continue for another generation, further refined. In this case the best of Keats will retain its relevance. But it may be that we are about to undergo another shift, a shift into a new romanticism, more sophisticated, of course, and more formally conscious than the old, but, I can only hope, with equal courage and openness to amplitude of emotion and experience. Indeed it may be a natural human craving for courage and openness, sharpened by long claustrophobia, that will have prodded us into such a shift and sustained it.

Should this be so, it would be difficult to imagine any poet since the mid-seventeenth century who could mean more. The help, the encouragement—the desire of which leads us constantly to reshuffle and re-evaluate our predecessors, when we are not doing so simply as an academic exercise—will not, of course, come from using even the greatest verse of Keats as a model. He that imitates the *Iliad*, said Edward Young, is not imitating Homer. The relevance is in what we catch from the example.

Keats's Sylvan Historian*

THERE is much in the poetry of Keats which suggests that he would have approved of Archibald MacLeish's dictum, 'A poem should not mean/ But be.' There is even some warrant for thinking that the Grecian urn (real or imagined) which inspired the famous ode was, for Keats, just such a poem, 'palpable and mute,' a poem in stone. Hence it is the more remarkable that the 'Ode' itself differs from Keats's other odes by culminating in a statement—a statement even of some sententiousness in which the urn itself is made to say that beauty is truth, and—more sententious still—that this bit of wisdom sums up the whole of mortal knowledge.

This is 'to mean' with a vengeance—to violate the doctrine of the objective correlative, not only by stating truths, but by defining the limits of truth. Small wonder that some critics have felt that the unravished bride of quietness protests too much.

T. S. Eliot, for example, says that 'this line ['Beauty is truth,' etc.] strikes me as a serious blemish on a beautiful poem; and the reason must be either that I fail to understand it, or that it is a statement which is untrue.' But even for persons who feel that they do understand it, the line may still constitute a blemish. Middleton Murry, who, after a discussion of Keats's other poems and his letters, feels that he knows what

* This essay had been finished some months before I came upon Kenneth Burke's brilliant essay on Keats's 'Ode' ('Symbolic Action in a Poem by Keats,' *Accent*, Autumn, 1943). I have decided not to make any alterations, though I have been tempted to adopt some of Burke's insights, and, in at least one case, his essay has convinced me of a point which I had considered but rejected—the pun on 'breed' and 'Brede.'

Keats meant by 'beauty' and what he meant by 'truth,' and that Keats used them in senses which allowed them to be properly bracketed together, still, is forced to conclude: 'My own opinion concerning the value of these two lines *in the context of the poem itself* is not very different from Mr. T. S. Eliot's.' The troubling assertion is apparently an intrusion upon the poem—does not grow out of it—is not dramatically accommodated to it.

This is essentially Garrod's objection, and the fact that Garrod does object indicates that a distaste for the ending of the 'Ode' is by no means limited to critics of notoriously 'modern' sympathies.

But the question of real importance is not whether Eliot, Murry, and Garrod are right in thinking that 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty' injures the poem. The question of real importance concerns beauty and truth in a much more general way: what is the relation of the beauty (the goodness, the perfection) of a poem to the truth or falsity of what it seems to assert? It is a question which has particularly vexed our own generation—to give it I. A. Richards' phrasing, it is the problem of belief.

The 'Ode,' by its bold equation of beauty and truth, raises this question in its sharpest form—the more so when it becomes apparent that the poem itself is obviously intended to be a parable on the nature of poetry, and of art in general. The 'Ode' has apparently been an enigmatic parable, to be sure: one can emphasize *beauty* is truth and throw Keats into the pure-art camp, the usual procedure. But it is only fair to point out that one could stress *truth* is beauty, and argue with the Marxist critics of the 'thirties for a propaganda art. The very ambiguity of the statement, 'Beauty is truth, truth beauty' ought to warn us against insisting very much on the statement in isolation, and to drive us back to a consideration of the context in which the statement is set.

It will not be sufficient, however, if it merely drives us back to a study of Keats's reading, his conversation, his letters. We shall not find our answer there even if scholarship does prefer on principle investigations of Browning's ironic question, 'What porridge had John Keats.' For even if we knew just what porridge he had, physical and mental, we should still not be able to settle the problem of the 'Ode.' The reason should be clear: our specific question is not what did Keats the man perhaps want to assert here about the relation of beauty and truth; it is rather: was Keats the poet able to exemplify that relation in this particular poem? Middleton Murry is right: the relation of the final statement in the poem to the total context is all-important.

Indeed, Eliot, in the very passage in which he attacks the 'Ode' has

indicated the general line which we are to take in its defense. In that passage, Eliot goes on to contrast the closing lines of the 'Ode' with a line from *King Lear*, 'Ripeness is all.' Keats's lines strike him as false; Shakespeare's, on the other hand, as not clearly false, and as possibly quite true. Shakespeare's generalization, in other words, avoids raising the question of truth. But is it really a question of truth and falsity? One is tempted to account for the difference of effect which Eliot feels in this way: 'Ripeness is all' is a statement put in the mouth of a dramatic character and a statement which is governed and qualified by the whole context of the play. It does not directly challenge an examination into its truth because its relevance is pointed up and modified by the dramatic context.

Now, suppose that one could show that Keats's lines, *in quite the same way*, constitute a speech, a consciously riddling paradox, put in the mouth of a particular character, and modified by the total context of the poem. If we could demonstrate that the speech was 'in character,' was dramatically appropriate, was properly prepared for—then would not the lines have all the justification of 'Ripeness is all'? In such case, should we not have waived the question of the scientific or philosophic truth of the lines in favor of the application of a principle curiously like that of dramatic propriety? I suggest that some such principle is the only one legitimately to be invoked in any case. Be this as it may, the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' provides us with as neat an instance as one could wish in order to test the implications of such a maneuver.

It has seemed best to be perfectly frank about procedure: the poem is to be read in order to see whether the last lines of the poem are not, after all, dramatically prepared for. Yet there are some claims to be made upon the reader too, claims which he, for his part, will have to be prepared to honor. He must not be allowed to dismiss the early characterizations of the urn as merely so much vaguely beautiful description. He must not be too much surprised if 'mere decoration' turns out to be meaningful symbolism—or if ironies develop where he has been taught to expect only sensuous pictures. Most of all, if the teasing riddle spoken finally by the urn is not to strike him as a bewildering break in tone, he must not be too much disturbed to have the element of paradox latent in the poem emphasized, even in those parts of the poem which have none of the energetic crackle of wit with which he usually associates paradox. This is surely not too much to ask of the reader—namely, to assume that Keats meant what he said and that he chose his words with care. After all, the poem begins on a note of paradox, though a mild

one: for we ordinarily do not expect an urn to speak at all; and yet, Keats does more than this: he begins his poem by emphasizing the apparent contradiction.

The silence of the urn is stressed—it is a 'bride of quietness'; it is a 'foster-child of silence,' but the urn is a 'historian' too. Historians tell the truth, or are at least expected to tell the truth. What is a 'Sylvan historian'? A historian who is like the forest rustic, a woodlander? Or, a historian who writes histories of the forest? Presumably, the urn is sylvan in both senses. True, the latter meaning is uppermost: the urn can 'express / A flowery tale more sweetly than our rhyme,' and what the urn goes on to express is a 'leaf-fring'd legend' of 'Tempe or the dales of Arcady.' But the urn, like the 'leaf-fring'd legend' which it tells, is covered with emblems of the fields and forests: 'Overwrought, / With forest branches and the trodden weed.' When we consider the way in which the urn utters its history, the fact that it must be sylvan in both senses is seen as inevitable. Perhaps too the fact that it is a rural historian, a rustic, a peasant historian, qualifies in our minds the dignity and the 'truth' of the histories which it recites. Its histories, Keats has already conceded, may be characterized as 'tales'—not formal history at all.

The sylvan historian certainly supplies no names and dates—'What men or gods are these?' the poet asks. What it does give is action—of men *or* gods, of godlike men or of superhuman (though not daemonic) gods—action, which is not the less intense for all that the urn is cool marble. The words 'mad' and 'ecstasy' occur, but it is the quiet, rigid urn which gives the dynamic picture. And the paradox goes further: the scene is one of violent love-making, a Bacchanalian scene, but the urn itself is like a 'still unravish'd bride,' or like a child, a child 'of silence and slow time.' It is not merely like a child, but like a 'foster-child.' The exactness of the term can be defended. 'Silence and slow time,' it is suggested, are not the true parents, but foster-parents. They are too old, one feels, to have borne the child themselves. Moreover, they dote upon the 'child' as grandparents do. The urn is fresh and unblemished; it is still young, for all its antiquity, and time which destroys so much has 'fostered' it.

With Stanza II we move into the world presented by the urn, into an examination, not of the urn as a whole—as an entity with its own form—but of the details which overlay it. But as we enter that world, the paradox of silent speech is carried on, this time in terms of the objects portrayed on the vase.

The first lines of the stanza state a rather bold paradox—even the

dulling effect of many readings has hardly blunted it. At least we can easily revive its sharpness. Attended to with care, it is a statement which is preposterous, and yet true—true on the same level on which the original metaphor of the speaking urn is true. The unheard music is sweeter than any audible music. The poet has rather cunningly enforced his conceit by using the phrase, 'ye soft pipes.' Actually, we might accept the poet's metaphor without being forced to accept the adjective 'soft.' The pipes might, although 'unheard,' be shrill, just as the action which is frozen in the figures on the urn can be violent and ecstatic as in Stanza I and slow and dignified as in Stanza IV (the procession to the sacrifice). Yet, by characterizing the pipes as 'soft,' the poet has provided a sort of realistic basis for his metaphor: the pipes, it is suggested, are playing very softly; if we listen carefully, we can hear them; their music is just below the threshold of normal sound.

This general paradox runs through the stanza: action goes on though the actors are motionless; the song will not cease; the lover cannot leave his song; the maiden, always to be kissed, never actually kissed, will remain changelessly beautiful. The maiden is, indeed, like the urn itself, a 'still unravished bride of quietness'—not even ravished by a kiss; and it is implied, perhaps, that her changeless beauty, like that of the urn, springs from this fact.

The poet is obviously stressing the fresh, unwearied charm of the scene itself which can defy time and is deathless. But, at the same time, the poet is being perfectly fair to the terms of his metaphor. The beauty portrayed is deathless because it is lifeless. And it would be possible to shift the tone easily and ever so slightly by insisting more heavily on some of the phrasings so as to give them a darker implication. Thus, in the case of 'thou canst not leave/Thy song,' one could interpret: the musician cannot leave the song even if he would: he is fettered to it, a prisoner. In the same way, one could enlarge on the hint that the lover is not wholly satisfied and content: 'never canst thou kiss,/. . . *yet, do not grieve.*' These items are mentioned here, not because one wishes to maintain that the poet is bitterly ironical, but because it is important for us to see that even here the paradox is being used fairly, particularly in view of the shift in tone which comes in the next stanza.

This third stanza represents, as various critics have pointed out, a recapitulation of earlier motifs. The boughs which cannot shed their leaves, the unwearied melodist, and the ever-ardent lover reappear. Indeed, I am not sure that this stanza can altogether be defended against the charge that it represents a falling-off from the delicate but firm preci-

sion of the earlier stanzas. There is a tendency to linger over the scene sentimentally: the repetition of the word 'happy' is perhaps symptomatic of what is occurring. Here, if anywhere, in my opinion, is to be found the blemish on the ode—not in the last two lines. Yet, if we are to attempt a defense of the third stanza, we shall come nearest success by emphasizing the paradoxical implications of the repeated items; for whatever development there is in the stanza inheres in the increased stress on the paradoxical element. For example, the boughs cannot 'bid the Spring adieu,' a phrase which repeats 'nor ever can those trees be bare,' but the new line strengthens the implications of speaking: the falling leaves are a gesture, a word of farewell to the joy of spring. The melodist of Stanza II played sweeter music because unheard, but here, in the third stanza, it is implied that he does not tire of his song for the same reason that the lover does not tire of his love—neither song nor love is consummated. The songs are 'for ever new' because they cannot be completed.

The paradox is carried further in the case of the lover whose love is 'For ever warm and still to be enjoy'd.' We are really dealing with an ambiguity here, for we can take 'still to be enjoy'd' as an adjectival phrase on the same level as 'warm'—that is, 'still virginal and warm.' But the tenor of the whole poem suggests that the warmth of the love depends upon the fact that it has not been enjoyed—that is, 'warm and still to be enjoy'd' may mean also 'warm *because* still to be enjoy'd.'

But though the poet has developed and extended his metaphors furthest here in this third stanza, the ironic counterpoise is developed furthest too. The love which a line earlier was 'warm' and 'panting' becomes suddenly in the next line, 'All breathing human passion far above.' But if it is *above* all breathing passion, it is, after all, outside the realm of breathing passion, and therefore, not human passion at all.

(If one argues that we are to take 'All breathing human passion' as qualified by 'That leaves a heart high-sorrowful and cloy'd'—that is, if one argues that Keats is saying that the love depicted on the urn is above only that human passion which leaves one cloyed and not above human passion in general, he misses the point. For Keats in the 'Ode' is stressing the ironic fact that all human passion *does* leave one cloyed; hence the superiority of art.)

The purpose in emphasizing the ironic undercurrent in the foregoing lines is not at all to disparage Keats—to point up implications of his poem of which he was himself unaware. Far from it: the poet knows precisely what he is doing. The point is to be made simply in order to make sure

that we are completely aware of what he *is* doing. Garrod, sensing this ironic undercurrent, seems to interpret it as an element over which Keats was not able to exercise full control. He says: 'Truth to his main theme [the fixity given by art to forms which in life are impermanent] has taken Keats farther than he meant to go. The pure and ideal art of this "cold Pastoral," this "silent form," *has* a cold silentness which in some degree saddens him. In the last lines of the fourth stanza, especially the last three lines . . . every reader is conscious, I should suppose, of an undertone of sadness, of disappointment.' The undertone is there, but Keats has not been taken 'farther than he meant to go.' Keats's attitude, even in the early stanzas, is more complex than Garrod would allow: it is more complex and more ironic, and a recognition of this is important if we are to be able to relate the last stanza to the rest of the 'Ode.' Keats is perfectly aware that the frozen moment of loveliness is more dynamic than is the fluid world of reality *only* because it is frozen. The love depicted on the urn remains warm and young because it is not human flesh at all but cold, ancient marble.

With Stanza IV, we are still within the world depicted by the urn, but the scene presented in this stanza forms a contrast to the earlier scenes. It emphasizes, not individual aspiration and desire, but communal life. It constitutes another chapter in the history that the 'Sylvan historian' has to tell. And again, names and dates have been omitted. We are not told to what god's altar the procession moves, nor the occasion of the sacrifice.

Moreover, the little town from which the celebrants come is unknown; and the poet rather goes out of his way to leave us the widest possible option in locating it. It may be a mountain town, or a river town, or a tiny seaport. Yet, of course, there is a sense in which the nature of the town—the essential character of the town—is actually suggested by the figured urn. But it is not given explicitly. The poet is willing to leave much to our imaginations; and yet the stanza in its organization of imagery and rhythm does describe the town clearly enough; it is small, it is quiet, its people are knit together as an organic whole, and on a 'pious morn' such as this, its whole population has turned out to take part in the ritual.

The stanza has been justly admired. Its magic of effect defies reduction to any formula. Yet, without pretending to 'account' for the effect in any mechanical fashion, one can point to some of the elements active in securing the effect: there is the suggestiveness of the word 'green' in 'green altar'—something natural, spontaneous, living; there is

the suggestion that the little town is caught in a curve of the seashore, or nestled in a fold of the mountains—at any rate, is something secluded and something naturally related to its terrain; there is the effect of the phrase 'peaceful citadel,' a phrase which involves a clash between the ideas of war and peace and resolves it in the senses of stability and independence without imperialistic ambition—the sense of stable repose.

But to return to the larger pattern of the poem: Keats does something in this fourth stanza which is highly interesting in itself and thoroughly relevant to the sense in which the urn is a historian. One of the most moving passages in the poem is that in which the poet speculates on the strange emptiness of the little town which, of course, has not been pictured on the urn at all.

The little town which has been merely implied by the procession portrayed on the urn is endowed with a poignance beyond anything else in the poem. Its streets 'for evermore / Will silent be,' its desolation forever shrouded in a mystery. No one in the figured procession will ever be able to go back to the town to break the silence there, not even one to tell the stranger there why the town remains desolate.

If one attends closely to what Keats is doing here, he may easily come to feel that the poet is indulging himself in an ingenious fancy, an indulgence, however, which is gratuitous and finally silly; that is, the poet has created in his own imagination the town implied by the procession of worshipers, has given it a special character of desolation and loneliness, and then has gone on to treat it as if it were a real town to which a stranger might actually come and be puzzled by its emptiness. (I can see no other interpretation of the lines, 'and not a soul to tell / Why thou art desolate can e'er return.') But, actually, of course, no one will ever discover the town except by the very same process by which Keats has discovered it: namely, through the figured urn, and then, of course, he will not need to ask why it is empty. One can well imagine what a typical eighteenth-century critic would have made of this flaw in logic.

It will not be too difficult, however, to show that Keats's extension of the fancy is not irrelevant to the poem as a whole. The 'reality' of the little town has a very close relation to the urn's character as a historian. If the earlier stanzas have been concerned with such paradoxes as the ability of static carving to convey dynamic action, of the soundless pipes to play music sweeter than that of the heard melody, of the figured lover to have a love more warm and panting than that of breathing flesh and blood, so in the same way the town implied by the urn comes to have a

richer and more important history than that of actual cities. Indeed, the imagined town is to the figured procession as the unheard melody is to the carved pipes of the unwearied melodist. And the poet, by pretending to take the town as real—so real that he can imagine the effect of its silent streets upon the stranger who chances to come into it—has suggested in the most powerful way possible its essential reality for him—and for us. It is a case of the doctor's taking his own medicine: the poet is prepared to stand by the illusion of his own making.

With Stanza V we move back out of the enchanted world portrayed by the urn to consider the urn itself once more as a whole, as an object. The shift in point of view is marked with the first line of the stanza by the apostrophe, 'O Attic shape . . .' It is the urn itself as a formed thing, as an autonomous world, to which the poet addresses these last words. And the rich, almost breathing world which the poet has conjured up for us contracts and hardens into the decorated motifs on the urn itself: 'with brede/Of marble men and maidens overwrought.' The beings who have a life above life—'all breathing human passion far above'—are marble, after all.

This last is a matter which, of course, the poet has never denied. The recognition that the men and maidens are frozen, fixed, arrested, has, as we have already seen, run through the second, third, and fourth stanzas as an ironic undercurrent. The central paradox of the poem, thus, comes to conclusion in the phrase, 'Cold Pastoral.' The word 'pastoral' suggests warmth, spontaneity, the natural and the informal as well as the idyllic, the simple, and the informally charming. What the urn tells is a 'flowery tale,' a 'leaf-fring'd legend,' but the 'sylvan historian' works in terms of marble. The urn itself is cold, and the life beyond life which it expresses is life which has been formed, arranged. The urn itself is a 'silent form,' and it speaks, not by means of statement, but by 'teasing us out of thought.' It is as enigmatic as eternity is, for, like eternity, its history is beyond time, outside time, and for this very reason bewilders our time-ridden minds: it teases us.

The marble men and maidens of the urn will not age as flesh-and-blood men and women will: 'When old age shall this generation waste.' (The word 'generation,' by the way, is very rich. It means on one level 'that which is generated'—that which springs from human loins—Adam's breed; and yet, so intimately is death wedded to men, the word 'generation' itself has become, as here, a measure of time.) The marble men and women lie outside time. The urn which they adorn will remain. The 'Sylvan historian' will recite its history to other generations.

What will it say to them? Presumably, what it says to the poet now: that 'formed experience,' imaginative insight, embodies the basic and fundamental perception of man and nature. The urn is beautiful, and yet its beauty is based—what else is the poem concerned with?—on an imaginative perception of essentials. Such a vision is beautiful but it is also true. The sylvan historian presents us with beautiful histories, but they are true histories, and it is a good historian.

Moreover, the 'truth' which the sylvan historian gives is the only kind of truth which we are likely to get on this earth, and, furthermore, it is the only kind that we *have* to have. The names, dates, and special circumstances, the wealth of data—these the sylvan historian quietly ignores. But we shall never get all the facts anyway—there is no end to the accumulation of facts. Moreover, mere accumulations of facts—a point our own generation is only beginning to realize—are meaningless. The sylvan historian does better than that: it takes a few details and so orders them that we have not only beauty but insight into essential truth. Its 'history,' in short, is a history without footnotes. It has the validity of myth—not myth as a pretty but irrelevant make-belief, an idle fancy, but myth as a valid perception into reality.

So much for the 'meaning' of the last lines of the 'Ode.' It is an interpretation which differs little from past interpretations. It is put forward here with no pretension to novelty. What is important is the fact that it can be derived from the context of the 'Ode' itself.

And now, what of the objection that the final lines break the tone of the poem with a display of misplaced sententiousness? One can summarize the answer already implied thus: throughout the poem the poet has stressed the paradox of the speaking urn. First, the urn itself can tell a story, can give a history. Then, the various figures depicted upon the urn play music or speak or sing. If we have been alive to these items, we shall not, perhaps, be too much surprised to have the urn speak once more, not in the sense in which it tells a story—a metaphor which is rather easy to accept—but, to have it speak on a higher level, to have it make a commentary on its own nature. If the urn has been properly dramatized, if we have followed the development of the metaphors, if we have been alive to the paradoxes which work throughout the poem, perhaps then, we shall be prepared for the enigmatic, final paradox which the 'silent form' utters. But in that case, we shall not feel that the generalization, unqualified and to be taken literally, is meant to march out of its context to compete with the scientific and philosophical generalizations which dominate our world.

'Beauty is truth, truth beauty' has precisely the same status, and the same justification as Shakespeare's 'Ripeness is all.' It is a speech 'in character' and supported by a dramatic context.

To conclude thus may seem to weight the principle of dramatic propriety with more than it can bear. This would not be fair to the complexity of the problem of truth in art nor fair to Keats's little parable. Granted; and yet the principle of dramatic propriety may take us further than would first appear. Respect for it may at least insure our dealing with the problem of truth at the level on which it is really relevant to literature. If we can see that the assertions made in a poem are to be taken as part of an organic context, if we can resist the temptation to deal with them in isolation, then we may be willing to go on to deal with the world-view, or 'philosophy,' or 'truth' of the *poem as a whole* in terms of its dramatic wholeness: that is, we shall not neglect the maturity of attitude, the dramatic tension, the emotional *and* intellectual coherence in favor of some statement of theme abstracted from it by paraphrase. Perhaps, best of all, we might learn to distrust our ability to represent any poem adequately by paraphrase. Such a distrust is healthy. Keats's sylvan historian, who is not above 'teasing' us, exhibits such a distrust, and perhaps the point of what the sylvan historian 'says' is to confirm us in our distrust.

A Note on Ode to a Nightingale

DOUGLAS BUSH remarks of Keats's poetry in general, 'From first to last Keats's important poems are related to, or grow directly out of . . . inner conflicts,' and of the *Odes* he says

At first sight Keats's theme in the *Ode to a Nightingale* and the *Ode on a Grecian Urn* . . . is the belief that whereas the momentary experience of beauty is fleeting, the ideal embodiment of that moment in art, in song, or in marble, is an imperishable source of joy. If that were all, these odes should be hymns of triumph, and they are not. It is the very acme of melancholy that the joy he celebrates is joy in beauty that must die.¹

This comment is valuable, but misleading in emphasis. There are indeed conflicts in Keats's poetry, but in the odes cited by Professor Bush these conflicts are reconciled. The *Odes* do not express 'the very acme of melancholy' any more than they express the very acme of joy. They express an exquisite awareness of the existence of joy and melancholy, pleasure and pain, and art and life. They express a feeling that these are inseparable, although not identical, and they express acceptance of this inseparability of the elements of human experience. In the *Ode to a Nightingale* Keats portrays a state of intense aesthetic and imaginative feeling, too poignant for long duration, which arises with the song of a bird and vanishes when the song is done. The poet records his emotion and its passing without comment.

The impossibility of maintaining this mood of exaltation is the condition of its existence, for it is relative, and describable only by comparing

From *Modern Language Quarterly*, VIII (1947), pp. 81-4. Reprinted by permission of *Modern Language Quarterly*, The University of Washington, and William H. Matchett, editor.

it with more commonplace states of mind. No mood, furthermore, is simple and unalloyed by other feelings. Keats begins,

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk. . . .

This is not from grief, or envy of the nightingale, but from

. . . being too happy in thine happiness.

As in the *Ode on Melancholy*² he declares that intense pleasure is almost indistinguishable from numbing pain.

The *Nightingale* moves as a whole with the same steady advance and withdrawal as does the *Grecian Urn*. Stanzas II and III, however, represent as it were a false start, after the mood has been established in I. The 'draught of vintage' by whose magic power Keats would escape 'the weariness, the fever, and the fret' of life is rejected. If the last five lines of stanza III are drawn from Keats's own suffering, that suffering is here sublimated.

Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or new Love pine at them beyond tomorrow

has a serenity and ironic undertone not to be found in the poet's relations with Fanny Brawne.

The true beginning comes in stanza IV. Keats flies to the nightingale—

Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,
But on the viewless wings of Poesy.

The poem reaches its full intensity in this stanza and the three following. This outpouring of imaginative exaltation contrasts with the melancholy of the low-pitched stanza III, by itself unremarkable but functioning as an integral part of the poetic whole. As in the *Eve of St. Agnes* Keats uses life at its most unpromising as a point of departure. Only by being aware of sorrow can the poet devote himself wholeheartedly to joy, conscious the while that his respite will be brief. The soft and heavy texture of the imagery in IV and V reflects a spontaneous luxuriance of feeling and perception, a self-abandonment which is merely another aspect of his previous depression.

Stanza VI commences

Darkling I listen; and, for many a time
I have been half in love with easeful Death, . . .

The vivid sensuousness of the two preceding stanzas has been leading toward this. Death itself may offer the fullest sense of life:

Now more than ever seems it *rich* to die.

If the *Nightingale* is a lament for the brevity of life and joy, as Professor Bush has said, these are sentiments difficult to explain; but if the poem is simply an imaginative reflection of the complexity and intensity of human experience, Death may quite reasonably be viewed as its culmination.³

The spell is deepest in stanza VII, of which M. R. Ridley has said that it 'would, I suppose, by common consent be taken along with "Kubla Khan," as offering us the distilled sorceries of Romanticism.'⁴ In these lines the apparent contrast between the immortality of the Bird and the fugitive temporality of its hearers is strongly insisted upon:⁵

No hungry generations tread thee down;
The voice I hear this passing night was heard
In ancient days by emperor and clown:
Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
Through the sad heart of Ruth, when, sick for home
She stood in tears amid the alien corn. . . .

Yet this opposition is not real. The 'sad heart of Ruth' is as enduring as the nightingale, and after the same fashion. The temporal Ruth died long ago, the eternal Ruth lives on in poetry. Nor can one separate the temporal from the eternal, for it is by virtue of her grief, her exposure to accidental circumstance long since passed away, that she remains alive. So with the 'magic casements' which follow, but with a difference. Paradoxically, these are immortal because they have long since vanished, or alternatively because they never in cold fact existed. This paradox is the essence of their charm and their reality; viewed faintly down long vistas of time, or created consciously by imagination from diverse materials seized from the actual world, they have a unique being of their own. They exist as fully as the stubbornest, most intractable actuality, but they arise from actuality and cannot live apart from it. In this stanza the notions of temporality and timelessness do not conflict, but are brought together in harmonious relationship.

It is not mere accident that Keats breaks off here, at the peak of imaginative intensity, on the word 'forlorn,' which has its feet in two worlds. For the value of the imaginative experience depends upon its transience; it is only one mode, albeit the highest, among many. With consummate irony and psychological truth 'forlorn' breaks in like the tolling of a bell to signal the end of the poet's emotional exaltation. The 'faery lands' were 'forlorn' because remote and strange; the word itself is enchanted. The second 'forlorn' is homely and familiar, with a half-humorous ruefulness. It dwells upon the common earth, to which the poet now returns.⁶

The final stanza fills out the perfect rondure of the poem in a slow withdrawal, symbolized by the retreat of the bird itself so that objective description and subjective emotion are fused. The fading-away is slow and regular,

Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades . . .

and in the last two verses the process of withdrawal, now solely within the poet, comes to a smooth and quiet end:

Was it a vision or a waking dream?
Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?

Keats does not moralize after the event, nor utter lyric cries of pain, as he might be expected to if he were writing, for example, about the sadness of mutability. He has been writing about a full and rich experience, and having described that experience he stops.

NOTES

1. *Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in English Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass., 1937), pp. 82, 107.

2. Ay, in the very temple of Delight

Veil'd Melancholy has her sovran shrine . . . (ll. 25-26).

In the *Ode on Melancholy* Keats emphasizes the close relationship between different modes of experience even more thoroughly than in the *Nightingale*:

Make not your rosary of yew-berries
 Nor let the beetle, nor the death-moth be
 Your mournful Psyche, nor the downy owl
 A partner in your sorrow's mysteries;
 For shade to shade will come too drowsily,
 And drown the wakeful anguish of the soul (ll. 5-10).

Melancholy in its simple state is invisible; it is beheld only by him
 'whose strenuous tongue / Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine.'

3. Cf. *Why Did I Laugh*, with its conclusion,

Verse, Fame, and Beauty are intense indeed,
 But Death intenser—Death is Life's high meed.

4. *Keats's Craftsmanship* (Oxford, 1933), p. 227.

5. One must agree here with Amy Lowell that to object that the nightingale is obviously not immortal (see Robert Bridges, Introduction, *Poems of John Keats*, ed. G. Thorn Drury [London and New York, n.d.], I, lxiv) is to miss the point, although her manners in an argument are enough to provoke a saint (*John Keats* [Boston and New York, 1925], II, 252). She has certainly provoked H. W. Garrod (*Keats* [Oxford, 1926], pp. 113-14), whose saintliness, at least as regards Miss Lowell, is extremely well disguised.

6. Cf. Cleanth Brooks, *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (Chapel Hill, N. C., 1939), p. 31.

A Note on *To Autumn*

CRITICAL comment on *To Autumn* has generally agreed that it is the most mature and satisfying of the Odes; and it is pretty generally agreed that it is the most objective and impersonal of them. It is commonly regarded as an evocation of the sounds and sights of Autumn, expressive of placid fulfilment, and having no further suggestion. C. H. Herford's paragraph on the poem in the *Cambridge History* represents the general view:

In *Autumn*, finally, written after an interval of some months, the sense that beauty, though not without some glorious compensation, perishes, which, in varying degrees, dominates these three odes, yields to a serene and joyous contemplation of beauty itself. The 'season of mellow fruitfulness' wakens no romantic vision, no romantic longing, like the nightingale's song; it satisfies all senses, but enthalls and intoxicates none; everything breathes contented fulfilment without satiety, and beauty, too, is fulfilled and complete . . . Keats feels here no need either of prophecy or of retrospect. If, for a moment, he asks 'Where are the songs of spring?' it is only to reply 'Think not of them, thou hast thy music too.' This is the secret of his strength, if, also, of his limitation—to be able to take the beauty of the present moment so completely into his heart that it seems an eternal possession.

This reading is obviously possible, or it would not be so widely accepted; and it is apparently supported by Keats's own reference to the poem in his letter to J. H. Reynolds of 21 September, 1819:¹

From *John Keats: A Reassessment*, ed. Kenneth Muir (Liverpool University Press, 1958), pp. 95–101. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

How beautiful the season is now—How fine the air. A temperate sharpness about it. Really, without joking, chaste weather—Dian skies—I never lik'd stubble-fields so much as now—Aye better than the chilly green of the Spring. Somehow a stubble-plain looks warm—in the same way that some pictures look warm—This struck me so much in my Sunday's walk that I composed upon it.

Yet there are details in the poem that suggest something that is hardly compatible with a simple mood of satisfied fulfilment. 'Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?'—that has an indisputable note in it of the sad longing for what was lovely and is gone; the 'wailful choir' of gnats that 'mourn,' the light wind that 'lives and dies,' the day which, though bloomed, is 'soft-dying,' the sleeper 'drows'd with the fume of poppies'—these are touches that come closer to the world of the *Ode to a Nightingale* than to happy fulfilment, and suggest that there is more in the poem than the naive celebration of fruitfulness. The fact is also worth considering that we all know *To Autumn* by heart, whereas the beautiful, exact and sensitive descriptions of nature in, say, Clare, we have admired and enjoyed but not remembered. Possibly *To Autumn* imprints itself on our verbal memories not only because it is a beautiful picture of a season but because it comes home to us in a more important way. It is in fact my purpose to suggest that readings of the Herford kind are seriously wrong and do not do justice to the poem. As I read it,

Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are they?
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too

is not a momentary intrusion but the point of the whole poem.

The central element in the concept of Autumn created by the poem is that the season is a boundary, a space between two opposite conditions, a moment of poise when one movement culminates and the succeeding movement has scarcely begun. Keats begins deftly touching in these opposites from the first line: 'mists' and 'mellow fruitfulness'; 'bosom-friend, conspiring'; 'load, bless'; and the desirable apples nevertheless 'bend' the old ('moss'd') trees that bear them. Then follow three lines that appear to me univalent evocations of simple ripeness and fruitfulness, but the ambivalent note recurs in 'set budding, later flowers,' collocating beginnings and endings; and there is suggestion of fulness and of loss together in 'until they think warm days will never cease . . . o'er-brimm'd,' while 'warm days, summer, clammy cells' echo the initial contrast of mists and mellowness.

The two ideas of pause and of opposites continue in the next stanza. The hook 'spares the next swath' for a moment. Since one does not spare anybody something pleasant but only something painful, it is inevitably suggested that while from one point of view the reaping of the grain may be a good, from another it is not—in fact it involves the destruction of the 'twined flowers.' The furrow is 'half-reap'd,' the brook is a boundary over which a figure is seen in the poised act of stepping. But in this stanza the foreground is filled with Autumn seen as a woman in four postures of repose in harvest: sitting relaxed in a granary, sleeping in the midday break in the harvest field, keeping steady her head beneath her load of gleanings, and watching the final oozings of the cider press. It is inconceivable that Keats could in this year have had in his mind the images of harvest fields and a gleaner without also having in mind somewhere the image of Ruth whose sad heart among the alien corn provided one of his most memorable passages in the *Ode to a Nightingale*. It is worth remembering, in connection with *To Autumn*, that Ruth lay down at Boaz' feet in the *threshing floor* where, after *winnowing*, he 'lay at the end of the heap of corn' (*Ruth*, iii. 2-7); that she 'sat beside the reapers' at the meal-time break (ii. 14); and that she 'gleaned in the field' and Boaz filled her veil with six measures of barley and 'laid it on her' (ii. 17, iii. 15). Compare 'granary floor, winnowing wind, half-reap'd furrow, gleaner . . . laden head.' Ruth had left her own country and now lived in a foreign land; she had lost her husband and was now a widow, though in due course she was to become the wife of Boaz. The point of pause and the opposites are there in the biblical story, and offered to Keats's imagination associative links with the context in *To Autumn*. But in the *Ode to a Nightingale* Keats had established a strong association between Ruth and the 'hungry generations' that tread down the human individual who must die and give place to them. There, Ruth stands as an example of the transient individual, consoled in her grief by the unchanging song of the nightingale. The three quasi-Ruth figures in *To Autumn* may well have had in Keats's imagination associations harmonizing with the reaping hook that both harvests and destroys, with the fruit that blesses but loads the vines, with the apples that ripen and flourish but bend the bearing tree, with the press that squeezes the last oozing drops from the apples themselves. The reader may not have the same spontaneous associations, but it seems likely that under the surface of the poem there has by this point developed not only the concept of Autumn as the place between the desirable and the unde-

sirable, between warmth and chill, between summer and winter, but also as the pause between the generation that has been fruitful and the rising of the generation which is its fruit. And it seems likely that most readers have reacted in some way to these concepts, for it feels imaginatively right that the third stanza of the poem should bring this bittersweet out into the open, with the songs of Spring lost and replaced by the music of Autumn.

The music of Autumn which ends the poem is a music of living and dying, of staying and departure, of summer-winter. The wailful choir of small gnats rises and falls as the gusts of the light wind live or die—a beautiful symbol of the generations that fall and rise and in Autumn yield place, the old to the young. (In the context of the ideas that I suggest the poem contains, the reading ‘sallows’—willows, with their connotations of sorrow, loss and bereavement—seems a more appropriate word than the ‘shallows’ which is printed by Garrod in his edition.) The ‘full-grown lambs’ is a phrase that has been objected to on the common sense grounds that a full-grown lamb is not a lamb any longer, but is either a ewe or a ram. But it is a phrase that is fully justified on this reading of the poem: that which was a lamb in the Spring is now full grown and on the point of superseding the generation of its begetters. It bleats from ‘hilly bourn’ which is an ambiguous phrase. It might mean ‘hilly brook’ but it more likely means ‘hilly boundary.’ Shakespeare’s use of the word in that sense rather than the Scottish tour of 1818 would, one guesses, be dominant on Keats, and besides, *To Autumn* was composed at Winchester, where, as Keats remarks in a letter to John Taylor of 5 September, 1819, ‘there is on one side of the city a dry chalky down.’ But whether ‘bourn’ means brook or boundary, it still connotes a place between two areas, and the full-grown lamb, poised between two phases of life, is appropriately situated. ‘Hedge-cricket’ are grasshoppers. Why then did Keats not say ‘Grasshoppers sing’? Possibly, in part, because a hedge also is a boundary, but possibly, too, because he had already seen the Grasshopper and the Cricket as types of the music of summer and winter:

A voice will run
From hedge to hedge about the new mown mead;
That is the Grasshopper’s . . .
When the frost
Has wrought a silence, from the stove there shrills
The Cricket’s song . . .

By using the alternative name, Hedge-cricket, Keats manages to suggest in one word both the singer of the past summer and the singer of the coming winter. The red-breast that whistles from the garden-croft is characteristically a winter bird and remains in England; the swallow is proverbially the bird of summer and leaves the country when summer is over: its departure is the signal for the beginning of winter.

This final image of the swallows is of special interest. We know that Keats translated the *Aeneid* while he was still a schoolboy; and in the sixth book there is the striking and memorable description of the souls of the dead on the banks of the river of the underworld. It is a crowd in which the generations come together, and Virgil mentions matrons and men, heroes, young boys and unwedded girls, and youth taken to the pyre before the eyes of their sorrowing parents; and of this crowd, some *pass on* over the *river* into a new state of existence and some must *remain* on the hither bank. The general links with the contents of *To Autumn* are clear. But more interesting are the two similes Virgil uses to describe the throng. They are, first, 'as many as the leaves that fall in the first cold of Autumn' and, second, 'as many as the birds that gather (glomerantur) when the cold year drives them across the sea.'² Birds gathering for migration have links, in fact, with both the decay of autumn and with the dead generations of mankind. The wailful choir of gnats may also be linked with Virgil's account of the souls who must stay on the hither bank and for a hundred years 'wander' and 'float hovering' (volitant) about 'these shores' until they are permitted to return to the still and fenny waters (stagna) that they yearn for (exoptata).³

I have not so far asked whether there is, apart from the gleanings of Ruth, any evidence outside the poem that such an interpretation as I suggest accords with Keats's imagination. There are indications that it does. The main point of the poem as I see it is, after all, the main subject of *Hyperion* in which the glory of the new Gods shines out to eclipse the Titans, the loss of whose old grandeur is the price that must be paid for the new beauty. As for the details of the interpretation, one might refer to the letter to Reynolds describing the walk that prompted the composition of *To Autumn*, where Keats goes on immediately to say, 'I always somehow associate Chatterton with autumn.' If we turn up the early sonnet to find out what Chatterton meant to Keats we find Keats seeing in him, as in *Autumn*, a juxtaposition of opposites, a junction of endings and beginnings, and a youthful music silenced and replaced by another, different, music:

How soon thy voice, majestic and elate
Melted in dying numbers! Oh! how nigh
Was night to thy fair morning. Thou didst die
A half-blown flow'ret which cold blasts amate.
But this is past: thou art among the stars
Of highest Heaven: to the rolling spheres
Thou sweetly singest . . .

Some details of *To Autumn* may originate in Coleridge.⁴ There are notable parallels to the final paragraph of *Frost at Midnight*:

Therefore all *seasons* shall be sweet to thee,
Whether the *summer* clothe the general earth
With greenness, or the *redbreast* sit and *sing*
Betwixt the tufts of snow on the bare branch
Of *mossy apple-tree*, while the nigh *thatch*
Smokes in the *sun-thaw*; whether the *eave-drops* fall
Heard only in the trances of the blast,
Or if the secret ministry of frost
Shall hang them up in silent icicles,
Quietly shining to the quiet moon.

If Coleridge's poem were indeed stirring in Keats's memory, it would harmonize well with *To Autumn*, for *Frost at Midnight* is about Coleridge the parent regretting his frustrated and lost youth but determined that his baby son should have a fuller and more natural life: out of the parent's spoiled life should come a new and better being.

I would argue, then, that Herford was wrong in saying that *To Autumn*, unlike the *Nightingale* and the *Grecian Urn*, does not include the 'sense that beauty, though not without some glorious compensation, perishes.' On the contrary, central to the poem is the sense that a new good is purchased only at the price of the loss of a former good. Far from being an objective, self-sufficient evocation of the 'beauty of the present moment' it is, as Mr. J. M. Murry once suggested, a projection in image and symbol of the calm Shakespearian vision: 'Man must abide his going hence, even as his coming hither. Ripeness is all.' It is in *To Autumn* rather than in the sonnet *On Sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again* that Keats realizes 'The bitter Sweet of this Shakespearian fruit.'

NOTES

1. *Letters*, ed. M. B. Forman (London, 1947), p. 384.
2. The same passage contains a description of the ills that dwell in the porch of the underworld, and this has some parallels with stanza three of the *Ode to a Nightingale*.
3. It is worth noting, perhaps, that in the Homeric equivalent of the *Aeneid*, vi (*Odyssey*, end of book 10, book 11) Chapman makes Circe direct Odysseus to seek a place where grow 'sallows that their fruits soon lose' (noted by De Selincourt), and puts into the mouth of the ghost of Odysseus' mother the words: 'When the Summer came/And Autumn all fruits ripen'd with his flame,/Where grape-charged vines made shadows most abound.'
4. We know that Keats wrote for a copy of *Sibylline Leaves* in November, 1817, and there are several echoes of Coleridge in his poetry. Thus, for instance, the relationship between Coleridge's *Love* and *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* has been commented on; there is a possibly significant parallel between Coleridge's

Each matin bell, the Baron saith
Knells us back to a world of death

and Keats's

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self . . .

and 'The Frost performs its secret ministry . . . extreme silentness . . . may lie behind Keats's 'When the frost Has wrought a silence . . .'

The Hoodwinking of Madeline: Skepticism
in *The Eve of St. Agnes*

I

THE COMMONEST response to *The Eve of St. Agnes* has been the celebration of its "heady and perfumed loveliness." The poem has been called "a monody of dreamy richness," "one long sensuous utterance," "an expression of lyrical emotion," "a great affirmation of love," "a great choral hymn," an expression of "unquestioning rapture," and many things else. Remarks like these tend to confirm one's uneasy feeling that what is sometimes called "the most perfect" of Keats's longer poems is a mere fairy-tale romance, unhappily short on meaning. For many readers, as for Douglas Bush, the poem is "no more than a romantic tapestry of unique richness of color"; one is "moved less by the experience of the characters than . . . by the incidental and innumerable beauties of descriptive phrase and rhythm."¹

To be sure, not all critics have merely praised Keats's pictures. After all, the poem opens on a note of "bitter chill," and progresses through images of cold and death before the action gets under way. When young Porphyro comes from across the moors to claim his bride, he enters a hostile castle, where Madeline's kinsmen will murder even upon holy days; and in the face of this danger he proceeds to Madeline's bedchamber. With the sexual consummation of their love, a storm comes up, and they must escape the castle, past "sleeping dragons," porter, and bloodhound, out into the night. The ending reverts

From *The Hoodwinking of Madeline and Other Essays on Keats's Poems* (University of Illinois Press, 1971), pp. 67-93. Copyright © 1971 by University of Illinois Press. Reprinted, with slight revisions by the author, by permission of the author and the publisher.

to the opening notes of bitter chill and death: Madeline's kinsmen are benighted, the old Beadsman and Madeline's nurse Angela are grotesquely dispatched into the next world. Some obvious contrasts are made in the poem: the lovers' youth and vitality are set against the old age and death associated with Angela and the Beadsman; the warmth and security of Madeline's chamber are contrasted with the coldness and hostility of the rest of the castle and the icy storm outside; the innocence and purity of young love are played off against the sensuousness of the revelers elsewhere in the castle; and so on. Through these contrasts, says one critic, Keats created a tale of young love "not by forgetting what everyday existence is like, but by using the mean, sordid, and commonplace as a foundation upon which to build a high romance"; the result is no mere fairy tale, but a poem that "has a rounded fulness, a complexity and seriousness, a balance which remove it from the realm of mere magnificent tour de force."²

But still something is wanting. The realistic notes all seem to occur in the framework, and the main action is all romance. There is no interaction between the contrasting elements, and hence no conflict. Porphyro is never really felt to be in danger; through much of the poem the lovers are secluded from the rest of the world; and at the end, when they escape, they meet no obstacle, but rather "glide, like phantoms, into the wide hall; / Like phantoms, to the iron porch, they glide. . . . By one, and one, the bolts full easy slide:— / The chains lie silent . . . The key turns . . . the door upon its hinges groans. / And they are gone" (361–370). It is all too easy. Though the poem ends with the nightmares of the warriors, and the deaths of Angela and the Beadsman, the lovers seem untouched, for they have already fled the castle. And besides, this all happened "ages long ago" (370). We are back where we started, with a fairy-tale romance, unhappily short on meaning.

The only serious attempt to make something of the poem has come from a small group of critics whom I shall call "metaphysical critics" because they think Keats was a metaphysician.³ To them the poem seems to dramatize certain ideas that Keats held a year or two earlier about the nature of the imagination, the relationship between this world and the next, and the progress of an individual's ascent toward spiritualization.

According to the popular superstition connected with St. Agnes' Eve, a young maiden who fasts and neither speaks nor looks about before she goes to bed may get sight of her future husband in a dream.

Madeline follows this prescription, dreams of her lover, then seems to awaken out of her dream to find him present in her chamber, an actual, physical fact. Her dream in a sense comes true. The events are thought to relate to a passage in the well-known letter to Benjamin Bailey, 22 November 1817, in which Keats expressed his faith in "the truth of Imagination": "What the imagination seizes as Beauty must be truth—whether it existed before or not. . . . The Imagination may be compared to Adam's dream—he awoke and found it truth." For the metaphysical critics, just as Adam dreamed of the creation of Eve, then awoke to find his dream a truth—Eve before him a beautiful reality—so Madeline dreams of Porphyro and awakens to find him present and palpably real.

But the imagination is not merely prophetic: it is "a Shadow of reality to come" hereafter; and in the same letter Keats is led on to "another favorite Speculation"—"that we shall enjoy ourselves here after by having what we called happiness on Earth repeated in a finer tone and so repeated. . . . Adam's dream will do here and seems to be a conviction that Imagination and its empyreal reflection is the same as human Life and its spiritual repetition" (*Letters*, I, 184–185). The idea is that a trust in the visionary imagination will allow us to "burst our mortal bars," to "dodge / Conception to the very bourne of heaven,"⁴ to transcend our earthly confines, guess at heaven, and arrive at some view of the reality to come. If the visionary imagination is valid, the earthly pleasures portrayed in our visions will make up our immortal existence—will be spiritually "repeated in a finer tone and so repeated."

In this sense, Madeline's dream of Porphyro is a case history in the visionary imagination. According to the metaphysical critics, she is, in her dream, at heaven's bourne, already enjoying a kind of spiritual repetition of earthly happiness. On being roused by Porphyro, she finds in him "a painful change" (300): "How chang'd thou art! how pallid, chill, and drear!" she says to him; "Give me that voice again . . . Those looks immortal" (311–313). Porphyro's reply takes the form of action: "Beyond a mortal man impassion'd far / At these voluptuous accents, he arose" (316–317). He transcends his mortal existence, joins Madeline at heaven's bourne by melting into her dream, and together they store up pleasures to be immortally repeated in a finer tone.

The other main strand of the critics' thinking concerns the apotheosis of Porphyro. By relating the poem to Keats's simile of human life as a

"Mansion of Many Apartments," the critics would persuade us that the castle of Madeline's kinsmen allegorically represents human life, and that Porphyro, passing upward to a closet adjoining Madeline's bed-chamber, and thence into the chamber itself, progresses from apartment to apartment in the mansion of life, executing a spiritual ascent to heaven's bourne. For a number of reasons, Keats's simile confuses rather than clarifies the poem.⁵ But the idea of spiritual pilgrimage is not entirely to be denied. Porphyro says to the sleeping Madeline, "Thou art my heaven, and I thine eremite" (277), and when she awakens, after the consummation, he exclaims to her: "Ah, silver shrine, here will I take my rest / After so many hours of toil and quest, / A famish'd pilgrim,—saved by miracle" (337-339).

In brief summary, the main points of the metaphysical critics' interpretation are that Madeline's awakening to find Porphyro in her bedroom is a document in the validity of the visionary imagination; that Porphyro in the course of the poem makes a spiritual pilgrimage, ascending higher by stages until he arrives at transcendent reality in Madeline's bed; and that there the lovers reenact earthly pleasures that will be stored up for further, still more elevated repetition in a finer tone. If these ideas seem farfetched and confused, the fact should be attributed in part to the brevity of my exposition, and to the shortcomings of any attempt to abstract ideas from a complicated poem, even when it is treated as allegory. Yet one may suggest reasons for hesitating to accept them.

For one thing, when the imaginative vision of beauty turns out to be truth—when Madeline awakens to find Porphyro in her bed—she is not nearly so pleased as Adam was when he awoke and discovered Eve. In fact, truth here is seemingly undesirable: Madeline is frightened out of her wits, and she laments, "No dream, alas! alas! and woe is mine! / Porphyro will leave me here to fade and pine" (328-329). For another, it is a reversal of Keats's own sequence to find in the poem the spiritual repetition of earthly pleasures. In Madeline's dream the imaginative enactment of pleasure comes first; it is an earthly repetition of spiritual pleasure that follows, and perhaps in a grosser, rather than a finer, tone. That the lovers are consciously intent on experiencing the conditions of immortality—consciously practicing for the spiritual repetition of pleasure at an even higher level of intensity—implies, if one reads the critics correctly, that both Madeline and Porphyro have read *Endymion*, Keats's letters, and the explications of the metaphysical critics.⁶

Much of the critics' interpretation rests on the religious language of the poem. Madeline is "St. Agnes' charmed maid," "a mission'd spirit" (192-193), "all akin / To spirits of the air" (201-202), "a saint," "a splendid angel, newly drest, / Save wings, for heaven," "so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint" (222-225). To Porphyro, her "eremite," she is "heaven" (277), and from closet to bedchamber he progresses from purgatory to paradise. Finally, Porphyro is "A famish'd pilgrim,—saved by miracle" (339). But the significance of such language is questionable. In *Romeo and Juliet*, with which *The Eve of St. Agnes* has much in common, Juliet's hand at the first meeting of the lovers is a "holy shrine," and Romeo's lips are "two blushing pilgrims"; subsequently Juliet is a "dear saint," a "bright angel," a "fair saint"; "heaven is . . . Where Juliet lives," and outside Verona is "purgatory, torture, hell itself"; she is compared to a "winged messenger of heaven," and her lips carry "immortal blessing." At the same time Romeo is "the god of [Juliet's] idolatry," and a "mortal paradise of . . . sweet flesh."⁷ In other poems Keats himself, in the manner of hundreds of poets before him, uses religious terms in hyperbolic love language: for example, Isabella's lover Lorenzo is called "a young palmer in Love's eye," he is said to "shrive" his passion, and (in a stanza ultimately rejected from the poem) he declares that he would be "full deified" by the gift of a love token.⁸

What is perhaps most telling against the critics, in connection with the religious language of *The Eve of St. Agnes*, is that when Porphyro calls himself "A famish'd pilgrim,—saved by miracle," his words must be taken ironically, unless Keats has forgotten, or hopes the reader has forgotten, all the action leading to the consummation. The miracle on which Porphyro congratulates himself is in fact a *stratagem* that he has planned and carried out to perfection. Early in the poem, when he first encounters Angela, she is amazed to see him, and says that he "must hold water in a witch's sieve, / And be liege-lord of all the Elves and Fays, / To venture" into a castle of enemies (120-122). Although Porphyro later assures Madeline that he is "no rude infidel" (342), the images in Angela's speech tend to link him with witches and fairies rather than with the Christian pilgrim. By taking a closer look at the poem, we may see that Keats had misgivings about Porphyro's fitness to perform a spiritual pilgrimage and arrive at heaven.

II

Porphyro's first request of Angela, "Now tell me where is Madeline" (114), is followed by an oath upon the holy loom used to weave St. Agnes' wool, and it is implied that he is well aware what night it is. "St. Agnes' Eve," says Angela, "God's help! my lady fair the conjuror plays / This very night: good angels her deceive!" (123-125). While she laughs at Madeline's folly, Porphyro gazes on her, until "Sudden a thought came like a full-blown rose. . . . then doth he propose / A stratagem" (136-139). The full force of "stratagem" comes to be felt in the poem—a ruse, an artifice, a trick for deceiving. For Angela, the deception of Madeline by good angels is funny; but Porphyro's is another kind of deception, and no laughing matter. She is startled, and calls him "cruel," "impious," "wicked" (140, 143); the harshness of the last line of her speech emphasizes her reaction: "Thou canst not surely be the same that thou didst seem" (144).

Porphyro swears "by all saints" not to harm Madeline: "O may I ne'er find grace / When my weak voice shall whisper its last prayer, / If one of her soft ringlets I displace" (145-148). He next enforces his promise with a suicidal threat: Angela must believe him, or he "will . . . Awake, with horrid shout" his foemen, "And beard them" (151-153). Because Angela is "A poor, weak, palsy-stricken, churchyard thing" (155), she presently accedes, promising to do whatever Porphyro wishes—

Which was, to lead him, in close secrecy,
 Even to Madeline's chamber, and there hide
 Him in a closet, of such privacy
 That he might see her beauty unespied,
 And win perhaps that night a peerless bride,
 While legion'd fairies pac'd the coverlet,
 And pale enchantment held her sleepy-eyed. (163-169)

At this point our disbelief must be suspended if we are to read the poem as an affirmation of romantic love. We must leave our world behind, where stratagems like Porphyro's are frowned on, sometimes punished in the criminal courts, and enter an imaginary world where "in sooth such things have been" (81). But the narrator's summary comment on the stratagem is that "Never on such a night have lovers met, / Since Merlin paid his Demon all the monstrous debt" (170-171). The allusion is puzzling. Commentators feel that the "monstrous

debt" is Merlin's debt to his demon-father for his own life, and that he paid it by committing evil deeds, or perhaps specifically by effecting his own imprisonment and death through the misworking of a spell.⁹ However it is explained, it strengthens rather than dispels our suspicion, like Angela's, that Porphyro is up to no good; and, with the earlier images of "legion'd fairies" and "pale enchantment," it brings further associations of fairy lore and sorcery to bear on his actions. Then Angela asserts a kind of orthodox middle-class morality: "Ah! thou must needs the lady wed" (179).

She now leads Porphyro to Madeline's chamber, "silken, hush'd, and chaste," where he takes "covert" (187-188). In the first draft stanza XXI is incomplete, but two versions that can be pieced together call Porphyro's hiding place "A purgatory sweet to view loves own domain" and "A purgatory sweet to what may he attain."¹⁰ The rejected lines, mentioning "purgatory sweet" as a stage toward the "paradise" (244) of Madeline's chamber, are documents in Porphyro's spiritual pilgrimage, perhaps. The ideas of viewing love's own domain, or what he may attain, are documents in the peeping-Tomism that occupies the next few stanzas. As Angela is feeling her way toward the stair, she is met by Madeline, who turns back to help her down to "a safe level matting" (196). If the action is significant, its meaning lies in the juxtaposition of Madeline's unselfish act of "pious care" (194) with the leering overtones just before of Porphyro's having hidden himself in her closet, "pleas'd amain" (188) by the success of his stratagem, and with the tone of the narrator's words immediately following: "Now prepare, / Young Porphyro, for gazing on that bed; / She comes, she comes again, like ring-dove fray'd and fled" (196-198).

The mention of "ring-dove" is interesting. Porphyro has taken "covert"—the position of the hunter (or perhaps merely the bird-watcher). There follows a series of bird images that perhaps may be thought of in terms of the hunter's game. In a variant to the stanza Madeline is "an affrighted Swan"; here she is a "ring-dove"; in the next stanza her heart is "a tongueless nightingale" (206); later in the poem she is "A dove forlorn" (333); still later Porphyro speaks of robbing her nest (340), and in a variant says, "Soft Nightingale, I'll keep thee in a cage / To sing to me."¹¹ It is unlikely that all these images carry connotations of hunting, nest-robbing, and caging; Romeo will "climb a bird's nest" when he ascends the ladder to Juliet's room (II.v.76). But the single comparison of Madeline's heart to a "tongueless nightingale" seems significant. Leigh Hunt naturally missed the point: "The night-

ingale! how touching the simile! the heart a 'tongueless nightingale,' dying in that dell of the bosom. What thorough sweetness, and perfection of lovely imagery!"¹² Critics pointing to Sotheby's translation of Wieland's *Oberon* (VI.17), or to *Troilus and Criseyde* (III.1233-39), may also have missed the significance.¹³ For Keats's image embraces the entire story of the rape of Philomel, and with it he introduces a further note of evil that prevents us from losing ourselves in the special morality of fairy romance. Madeline has the status of one of St. Agnes' "lambs unshorn" (71); she is a maiden innocent and pure, but also is about to lose that status through what is in some ways a cruel deception. The comparison with Philomel is not inappropriate.

In stanza XXV, as Madeline is described kneeling, we are told that "Porphyro grew faint: / She knelt, so pure a thing, so free from mortal taint" (224-225). Though many reasons will suggest themselves why Porphyro grows faint, a novel one may be offered here. In his copy of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, after a passage in which Burton tells how "The Barbarians stand in awe of a fair woman, and at a beautiful aspect, a fierce spirit is pacified," Keats wrote: "abash'd the devil stood."¹⁴ He quotes from Book IV of *Paradise Lost*, where Satan is confronted by the beautiful angel Zephon: "Abasht the Devil stood, / And felt how awful goodness is, and saw / Virtue in her shape how lovely, saw, and pin'd / His loss" (846-849). But since Burton speaks of standing "in awe of a fair woman," Keats must also have recalled Book IX, in which Satan's malice is momentarily overawed by Eve's graceful innocence: "That space the Evil one abstracted stood / From his own evil, and for the time remain'd / Stupidly good" (463-465). Porphyro's faintness may in some way parallel Satan's moment of stupid goodness. "But the hot Hell that always in him burns" soon ends Satan's relapse from evil intent, as he goes about Eve's ruin. So with Porphyro; for "Anon his heart revives" (226), as he pursues the working-out of his stratagem.

Madeline undresses, then falls fast asleep. Porphyro creeps to the bed, "Noiseless as fear in a wide wilderness" (250), and "'tween the curtains peep'd, where, lol—how fast she slept" (252). At the bedside he sets a table, when, in the midst of his preparations, a hall door opens in the castle, and the revelers' music shatters the silence of the room. Porphyro calls for a "drowsy Morphean amulet" (257)—and then "The hall door shuts . . . and all the noise is gone" (261). Madeline continues sleeping, while he brings from the closet the feast of candied apple, quince, plum, and all the rest.

Aside from the unheroic implications of "Noiseless as fear in a wide wilderness" and of the word "peep'd," there are three things worth noting in the stanzas just summarized. One is the relationship the poem has here with *Cymbeline*, II.ii.11-50, in which the villainous Iachimo emerges from the trunk, where he has hidden himself, to gaze on the sleeping Imogen. Readers since Swinburne have noted resemblances.¹⁵ Imogen is "a heavenly angel," and like Madeline a "fresh lily," "whiter than the sheets," as she lies in bed, sleeping, in effect, an "azure-lidded sleep" (262)—and so on. But no critic has been willing to include among the resemblances that Porphyro's counterpart in the scene is a villain. In the speech from which these details have been drawn, Iachimo compares himself with Tarquin, who raped Lucrece, and he notes that Imogen "hath been reading late / The tale of Tereus; here the leaf's turn'd down / Where Philomel gave up."

The second point concerns Porphyro's call for a "drowsy Morpheap amulet"—a sleep-inducing charm to prevent Madeline's awakening when the music bursts forth into the room. Earlier he has wished to win Madeline while "pale enchantment held her sleepy-eyed" (169). Here he would assist "pale enchantment" with a "Morpheap amulet." It may not be amiss to recall Lovelace, and the stratagem by which he robbed Clarissa of her maidenhood. "I know thou wilt blame me for having had recourse to *Art*," writes Lovelace to John Belford, in Richardson's novel. "But do not physicians prescribe opiates in acute cases." Besides, "a Rape, thou knowest, to us Rakes, is far from being an undesirable thing."¹⁶

The third point has to do with the feast that Porphyro sets out. In his copy of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, opposite a passage in which Burton commends fasting as an excellent means of preparation for devotion, "by which chaste thoughts are ingendred . . . concupiscence is restrained, vicious . . . lusts and humours are expelled," Keats recorded his approval in the marginal comment "good."¹⁷ It is for some reason of this sort that Madeline fasts, going "supperless to bed" (51). Porphyro's feast seems intended to produce the opposite results, and there is more than a suggestion of pagan sensuality in the strange affair of eastern luxuries that he heaps as if by magic—"with glowing hand" (271)—on the table by the bed.¹⁸

Next Porphyro tries to awaken Madeline, or so it seems: "And now, my love, my seraph fair, awake! / Thou art my heaven, and I thine eremite" (276-277). The last line carries the suggestion that Porphyro has been reading of the martyrdom, not of St. Agnes, but of Donne's

lovers in *The Canonization*, whose bodies are by "reverend love" made "one anothers hermitage." It is curious that in the proposition that follows, "Open thine eyes . . . Or I shall drowse beside thee" (278-279), Porphyro does not wait for an answer: "Thus whispering, his warm, unnerved arm / Sank in her pillow" (280-281). "Awakening up" (289), he takes Madeline's lute and plays an ancient ditty, which causes her to utter a soft moan. It would seem that she does at this point wake up: "Suddenly / Her blue affrayed eyes wide open shone. . . . Her eyes were open, but she still beheld, / Now wide awake, the vision of her sleep" (295-299). Not unreasonably, we might think, she weeps, sighs, and "moan[s] forth witless words" (303).

We shall see in a moment, however, that she has not after all awakened from her trance. The "painful change" she witnesses—the substitution of the genuine Porphyro for the immortal looks and voice of her vision—"nigh expell'd / The blisses of her dream" (300-301), came near expelling them, but did not in fact do so. Apparently she is to be thought of as still in her trance, but capable of speaking to the Porphyro before her, when she says, "Ah, Porphyro! . . . but even now / Thy voice was at sweet tremble in mine ear" (307-308). To her request for "that voice again . . . Those looks immortal" (312-313), Porphyro offers neither, but rather impassioned action of god-like intensity. At the end of stanza XXXVI, the image of "St. Agnes' moon" combines the notions of St. Agnes, the patron saint of maidenhood, and Cynthia, the goddess of chastity, and the symbolic combination has "set," gone out of the picture to be replaced by a storm: "meantime the frost-wind blows / Like Love's alarum pattering the sharp sleet / Against the window-panes; St. Agnes' moon hath set" (322-324).

Keats's final manuscript version of the consummation, rejected by his publishers on moral grounds, as making the poem unfit to be read by ladies, is more graphic. For a rather lame conclusion to Madeline's speech (314-315), he substituted the lines, "See, while she speaks his arms encroaching slow, / Have zoned her, heart to heart,—loud, loud the dark winds blow!" Then he rewrote stanza XXXVI:

For on the midnight came a tempest fell;
More sooth, for that his quick rejoinder flows
Into her burning ear: and still the spell
Unbroken guards her in serene repose.
With her wild dream he mingled, as a rose
Marrieth its odour to a violet.
Still, still she dreams, louder the frost wind blows,

Like Love's alarum pattering the sharp sleet
Against the window panes:—St Agnes' Moon hath set.¹⁹

The revised version makes clearer that Madeline is still dreaming: "still the spell / Unbroken guards her in serene repose." And it makes clearer the connection between the sexual consummation, the setting of St. Agnes' moon, and the rising of the storm. When Porphyro's "quick rejoinder flows / Into her burning ear" ("close rejoinder" in the *E* transcript), we may or may not recall Satan "Squat like a Toad, close at the ear of *Eve*" (IV.800); but one would go out of his way to avoid a parallel between the advent of the storm in Keats's poem and the change in Nature that comes about when our first mother in an evil hour reached forth and ate the fruit: "Earth felt the wound, and Nature from her seat / Sighing through all her Works gave signs of woe, / That all was lost" (IX.782-784). Unlike Eve, however, rather more like Clarissa, Madeline by this time has no choice; the revision heightens the contrast between her innocent unconsciousness and the storm raging outside: "Still, still she dreams, louder the frost wind blows."

As printed, the poem continues: "'Tis dark: quick pattereth the flaw-blown sleet." Then Porphyro: "This is no dream, my bride, my Madeline!" Another line describes the storm: "'Tis dark: the iced gusts still rave and beat" (325-327). And now Madeline finally does wake up, if she ever does. Her speech shows a mixed attitude toward what has happened, but above all it is the lament of the seduced maiden: "No dream, alas! alas! and woe is mine! / Porphyro will leave me here to fade and pine.— / Cruell what traitor could thee hither bring?" (328-330). She will curse not, for her heart is lost in his, or, perhaps more accurately, still lost in her romantic idealization of him. But she is aware that her condition is woeful: Porphyro is cruel; Angela is a traitor; and Madeline is a "deceived thing;— / A dove forlorn and lost" (333). In subsequent stanzas Porphyro soothes her fears, again calls her his bride, and seems to make all wrongs right. He tells her that the storm outside is really only "an elfin-storm from faery land" (343), and that she should "Awake! arise! . . . and fearless be, / For o'er the southern moors I have a home for thee" (350-351). They hurry out of the chamber, down the wide stairs, through the castle door—"And they are gone . . . fled away into the storm" (370-371).

III

After giving so much space to Porphyro, in admittedly exaggerated fashion portraying him as peeping Tom and villainous seducer, I must

now confess that I do not think his stratagem is the main concern of the poem. I have presented him as villain in order to suggest, in the first place, that he is not, after all, making a spiritual pilgrimage, unless the poem is to be read as a satire on spiritual pilgrimages; in the second place, that the lovers, far from being a single element in the poem, are as much protagonist and antagonist as Belinda and the Baron, or Clarissa and Lovelace; and in the third place, that no matter how much Keats entered into the feelings of his characters, he could not lose touch with the claims and responsibilities of the world he lived in.

Certainly he partially identified himself with Porphyro. When Woodhouse found his revisions objectionable, Keats replied that he should "despise a man who would be such an eunuch in sentiment as to leave a maid, with that Character about her, in such a situation: & sho^d despise himself to write about it" (*Letters*, II, 163). One may cite the narrator's obvious relish in Porphyro's situation as Madeline is about to undress—"Now prepare, / Young Porphyro, for gazing on that bed" (196-197)—and Keats's later objection to the poem that "in my dramatic capacity I enter fully into the feeling: but in *Propria Persona* I should be apt to quiz it myself" (*Letters*, II, 174). But sexual passion worried him: to Bailey he confessed in July 1818, "When I am among Women I have evil thoughts" (I, 341), and he wrote in his copy of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, "there is nothing disgraces me in my own eyes so much as being one of a race of eyes nose and mouth beings in a planet call'd the earth who . . . have always mingled goatish winnyish lustful love with the abstract adoration of the deity."²⁰ Though it has touches of humor,²¹ *The Eve of St. Agnes* is a serious poem; regardless of the extent to which Keats identified with his hero, he introduced enough overtones of evil to make Porphyro's actions wrong within the structure of the poem.

From now on, however, it may be best to think of Porphyro as representing, like the storm that comes up simultaneously with his conquest, the ordinary cruelties of life in the world. Like Melville, Keats saw

Too far into the sea; where every maw
The greater on the less feeds evermore. . . .
Still do I that most fierce destruction see,
The shark at savage prey—the hawk at pounce,
The gentle Robin, like a pard or ounce,
Ravening a worm. (*Letters*, I, 262)

Let Porphyro represent one of the sharks under the surface. And to borrow another figure from Melville, let the main concern of the poem be the young Platonist dreaming at the masthead: one false step, his identity comes back in horror, and with a half-throttled shriek he drops through transparent air into the sea, no more to rise for ever. There are reasons why we ought not entirely to sympathize with Madeline. She is a victim of deception, to be sure, but of deception not so much by Porphyro as by herself and the superstition she trusts in. Madeline the self-hoodwinked dreamer is, I think, the main concern of the poem, and I shall spend some time documenting this notion and relating it to Keats's other important poems—all of which, in a sense, are about dreaming.

If we recall Keats's agnosticism, his sonnet *Written in Disgust of Vulgar Superstition* (Christianity), and his abuse in a spring 1819 journal letter of "the pious frauds of Religion" (*Letters*, II, 80), we may be prepared to see a hoodwinked dreamer in the poem even before we meet Madeline. He is the old Beadsman, so engrossed in an ascetic ritual that he is sealed off from the joys of life. After saying his prayers, he turns first through a door leading to the noisy revelry upstairs. "But no. . . . The joys of all his life were said and sung: / His was a harsh penance on St. Agnes' Eve" (22-24). And so he goes another way, to sit among rough ashes, while the focus of the narrative proceeds through the door he first opened, and on into the assembly of revelers, where we are introduced to Madeline and the ritual she is intent on following. In the final manuscript version, between stanzas VI and VII, Keats inserted an additional stanza on the ritual, in part to explain the feast that Porphyro sets out:

'Twas said her future lord would there appear
Offering, as sacrifice—all in the dream—
Delicious food, even to her lips brought near,
Viands, and wine, and fruit, and sugar'd cream,
To touch her palate with the fine extreme
Of relish: then soft music heard, and then
More pleasures follow'd in a dizzy stream
Palpable almost: then to wake again
Warm in the virgin morn, no weeping Magdalen.²²

Then the poem, as it was printed, continues describing Madeline, who scarcely hears the music, and, with eyes fixed on the floor, pays no attention to anyone around her.

Several things deserve notice. By brooding "all that wintry day, / On love, and wing'd St. Agnes' saintly care" (43-44), and by setting herself apart from the revelers, Madeline presents an obvious parallel with the Beadsman. Both are concerned with prayer and an ascetic ritual; both are isolated from the crowd and from actuality. A second point is that the superstition is clearly an old wives' tale: Madeline follows the prescription that "she had heard old dames full many times declare" (45). It is called by the narrator a "whim": "Full of this whim was thoughtful Madeline" (55). The irony of the added stanza enforces the point. Madeline's pleasures turn out to be palpable in fact. When she awakens to find herself with Porphyro, she is anything but warm: rather, she wakes up to "flaw-blown sleet" and "iced gusts" (325, 327); it is no virgin morn for her; and she is a "weeping Magdalen," who cries, "alas! alas! and woe is mine!" (328). But here, early in the poem, "she saw not: her heart was elsewhere: / She sigh'd for Agnes' dreams, the sweetest of the year" (62-63). Perfunctorily dancing along, she is said to be "Hoodwink'd with faery fancy; all amorst, / Save to St. Agnes and her lambs unshorn" (70-71).

The superstition is next mentioned when Angela tells that Madeline "the conjuror plays / This very night: good angels her deceive!" (124-125). Porphyro thinks of the ritual in terms of "enhantments cold" and "legends old" (134-135). Proceeding to her chamber, Madeline is called "St. Agnes' charmed maid," "a mission'd spirit, unaware" (192-193). When she undresses, "Half-hidden, like a mermaid in sea-weed" (231), she is perhaps linked briefly with the drowning Ophelia, whose spreading clothes momentarily support her "mermaid-like" upon the water; like Ophelia, she is engrossed in a fanciful dream-world.²⁸ "Pensive awhile she dreams awake, and sees, / In fancy, fair St. Agnes in her bed, / But dares not look behind, or all the charm is fled" (232-234). This last line carries a double meaning: in following her ritual, Madeline must look neither "behind, nor sideways" (53); but the real point is that if she did look behind, she would discover Porphyro, and then "the charm" would be "fled" for a more immediate reason.

Asleep in bed, Madeline is said to be "Blissfully haven'd both from joy and pain . . . Blinded alike from sunshine and from rain, / As though a rose should shut, and be a bud again" (240-243). Her dream is "a midnight charm / Impossible to melt as iced stream," "a stedfast spell" (282-283, 287). It is while she is in this state of stuporous insensibility—while "still the spell / Unbroken guards her in serene repose," "Still, still she dreams, louder the frost wind blows"—that Por-

phyro makes love to her. On awakening to learn, "No dream, alas! alas! and woe is mine," she calls herself "a deceived thing," echoing Angela's words earlier, "good angels her deceive!" Her condition is pitiful, yet at the same time reprehensible. Her conjuring (perhaps like Merlin's) has backfired upon her, and as hoodwinked dreamer she now gets her reward in coming to face reality a little too late. The rose cannot shut, and be a bud again.

IV

Whether *The Eve of St. Agnes* is a good poem depends in large part on the reader's willingness to find in it a consistency and unity that may not in fact be there.²⁴ But however it is evaluated, it stands significantly at the beginning of Keats's single great creative year, 1819, and it introduces a preoccupation of all the major poems of this year: that an individual ought not to lose touch with the realities of this world.

In the poems of 1819, Keats's most explicit, unequivocal pronouncement on the conditions of human life comes in the *Ode on Melancholy*. Life in the world, we are told five or six times in the statements and images of the third stanza, is an affair in which pleasure and pain are inseparably mixed. There is no pleasure without pain, and, conversely, if pain is sealed off, so also is pleasure. One accepts life on these terms, or else suffers a kind of moral and spiritual emptiness amounting to death. The former is the better choice: he lives most fully "whose strenuous tongue / Can burst Joy's grape against his palate fine." The images of the first stanza—forgetfulness, narcotics, poisons, death—represent various ways of avoiding pain in life. But they are rejected (the whole stanza is a series of negatives) because they also exclude pleasure and reduce life to nothing ("For shade to shade will come too drowsily, / And drown the wakeful anguish of the soul"). The equivalent of these anodynes elsewhere in Keats's poems is dreaming, trusting in the visionary imagination; and, to cut short further explanation, the dreamer in the works of 1819 is always one who would escape pain, but hopes, wrongly, to achieve pleasure.

Take Madeline as the first instance. In bed, under the delusion that she can achieve bliss in her dream, yet wake up in the virgin morn no weeping Magdalen, she is "Blissfully haven'd both from joy and pain" (240)—for all practical purposes in the narcotic state rejected by the *Ode on Melancholy*, experiencing nothing. Keats reiterates the idea two lines later, "Blinded alike from sunshine and from rain," and the folly of her delusion is represented by the reversal of natural process,

"As though a rose should shut, and be a bud again" (242-243). As generally in Keats's poems, dreaming is attended by fairy-tale imagery: under the spell of "faery fancy," Madeline plays the conjuror, and Porphyro is linked in several ways with fairy lore, witchcraft, and sorcery, as well as pagan sensuality. It is possible that Madeline never completely awakens from her fanciful dream; for she believes Porphyro when he tells her that the storm is "an elfin-storm from faery land" (343), and she imagines "sleeping dragons all around" (353) when they hurry out of the castle.²⁵

The heroine of *The Eve of Saint Mark*, written a week or so after the completion of *The Eve of St. Agnes*, in some ways resembles Madeline. Among the "thousand things" perplexing Bertha in the volume she pores over are "stars of Heaven, and angels' wings, / Martyrs in a fiery blaze, / Azure saints in silver rays" (29-32). Enwrapped in the legend of St. Mark, "dazed with saintly imag'ries" (56), she ignores the life in the village around her, and cuts herself off from reality—a "poor cheated soul" (69), "lost in dizzy maze"²⁶ and mocked by her own shadow.

The wretched knight-at-arms in *La Belle Dame sans Merci* is similarly a hoodwinked dreamer. *La Belle Dame* is "a faery's child"; she sings "A faery's song," speaks "in language strange," and takes him to an "elfin grot." When he awakens from his vision he finds himself "On the cold hill's side." But he is still the dupe of his dream, still hoodwinked, because he continues, in a barren landscape, "Alone and palely loitering," hoping for a second meeting with *La Belle Dame*. And he denies himself participation in the actual world, which, in contrast to his bleak surroundings, is represented as a more fruitful scene, where "The squirrel's granary is full, / And the harvest's done."

In *Lamia*, the hoodwinked dreamer is of course Lycius, who falls in love with the serpent-woman *Lamia*, in whose veins runs "elfin blood," who lingers by the wayside "fairly," with whom he lives in "sweet sin" in a magical palace with a "faery-roof" (I.147, 200; II.31, 123). "She seem'd, at once, some penanced lady elf, / Some demon's mistress, or the demon's self" (I.55-56). What she promises to do for Lycius is what, according to the *Ode on Melancholy*, cannot be done for mortal men: "To unperplex bliss from its neighbour pain; / Define their pettish limits, and estrange / Their points of contact, and swift counter-change." The inseparability of pleasure and pain is for her a "specious chaos"; she will separate them "with sure art" (I.192-196)—or so the blinded Lycius thinks. But "Spells are but made to break," wrote

Keats, in a passage subsequently omitted from the text.²⁷ "A thrill / Of trumpets" reminds Lycius of the claims of the "noisy world almost forsworn" (II.27-33), and he holds a wedding feast, at which "cold philosophy," in the form of his old tutor Apollonius, attends to put "all charms" to flight. The "foul dream" Lamia vanishes under the tutor's piercing eye, and Lycius, too engrossed in his dream to survive, falls dead.

From *Lamia*, we may merely dip into *The Fall of Hyperion* to recall Keats's condemnation of dreamers.²⁸ They are "vision'ries," "dreamers weak," who seek out wonders, but ignore what is most important, the human face (I.161-163). "Only the dreamer venoms all his days" (I.175), the speaker learns on the steps of Moneta's temple. "The poet and the dreamer are distinct, / Diverse, sheer opposite, antipodes. / The one pours out a balm upon the world, / The other vexes it" (I.199-202).

Keats's mature view of dreamers illuminates perhaps most importantly the two best odes, *On a Grecian Urn* and *To a Nightingale*. In each poem the speaker begins as dreamer, hoodwinked with the idea that he can unperplex bliss from its neighbor pain, that he can find an anodyne to the ills of the flesh by joining the timeless life pictured on an urn, or by fading away into the forest with a bird. In each case the result is an awareness that spells are but made to break: the speaker recognizes the falseness of the dream, the shortcomings of the ideal he has created, and he returns to the mortal world. Life on the urn is at first attractive: unheard melodies are sweeter; the lovers will remain young and fair; the trees will never lose their leaves. Yet it is a static situation. Love must be enjoyed, not be stopped forever at a point when enjoyment is just out of reach. The final judgment is that the urn is a "Cold Pastoral," a "friend to man" that, as a work of art, teases him out of thought but offers no possible substitute for life in the actual world.

In the *Ode to a Nightingale*, the speaker would fade away with the bird, and forget "The weariness, the fever, and the fret" of the mortal world, "Where Beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes, / Or new Love pine at them beyond to-morrow." But when he imaginatively joins the bird in the forest, he immediately longs for the world he has just rejected: "Here there is no light. . . . I cannot see what flowers are at my feet." "In embalmed darkness" he is forced to "guess each sweet" of the transient natural world. As he continues musing, the bird takes on for him the fairy-tale associations that we saw earlier connected

with Madeline's dream, La Belle Dame, and Lamia: its immortal voice has charmed "magic casements . . . in faery lands forlorn." The realization that the faery lands are forlorn of human life tolls the dreamer back to his sole self, and he wakes up. The nightingale, symbol of dreams and the visionary imagination, has turned out to be a "deceiving elf." The fancy "cannot cheat so well."

The metaphysical critics are right in asserting Keats's early trust in the imagination. What they sometimes fail to recognize, themselves eager for glimpses of heaven's bourne, and to an extent hoodwinked with their own rather than Keats's metaphysics, is that before Keats wrote more than a handful of poems we would not willingly let die, he in large part changed his mind.²⁹ Late in January 1818, on sitting down to read *King Lear* once again, he wrote a sonnet bidding goodbye to romance: "Let me not wander in a barren dream." A few days later he called it "A terrible division" when the soul is flown upward and the body "earthward press'd." In March he wrote, "It is a flaw / In happiness to see beyond our bourn," and about the same time he recognized that "Four Seasons"—not just eternal spring, as the visionary might conjure up—"Four Seasons fill the Measure of the year." Similarly "Four Seasons are there in the mind of Man," who "hath his Winter too of pale Misfeature, / Or else he would forget his mortal nature" (*Letters*, I, 215, 221, 262, 243). In July, on his walking trip to Scotland, he wrote:

Scanty the hour and few the steps beyond the bourn of care,
Beyond the sweet and bitter world,—beyond it unaware!
Scanty the hour and few the steps, because a longer stay
Would bar return, and make a man forget his mortal way:
O horrible! . . .
No, no, that horror cannot be, for at the cable's length
Man feels the gentle anchor pull and gladdens in its strength.
(Lines Written in the Highlands, ll. 29-40)

It is the gentle anchor of mortality that ties us to the world; man gladdens in its strength. "Fancy," said Keats to Reynolds, "is indeed less than a present palpable reality" (*Letters*, I, 325). It would be a distortion of fact to maintain that he always held this later view, but it is worth noting that even when he and his fancy could not agree, he declared himself "more at home amongst Men and women," happier reading Chaucer than Ariosto (II, 234).

The dreamer in Keats is ultimately one who turns his back, not

merely on the pains of life, but on life altogether; and in the poems of 1819, beginning with *The Eve of St. Agnes*, his dreaming is condemned. If the major concern in these poems is the conflict between actuality and the ideal, the result is not rejection of the actual, but rather a facing-up to it that amounts, in the total view, to affirmation. It is a notable part of Keats's wisdom that he never lost touch with reality, that he reproved his hoodwinked dreamers who would shut out the world, that he recognized life as a complexity of pleasure and pain, and laid down a rule for action: achievement of the ripest, fullest experience that one is capable of. These qualities make him a saner if in some ways less romantic poet than his contemporaries, and they should qualify him as the Romantic poet most likely to survive in the modern world.

NOTES

1. *John Keats: Selected Poems and Letters* (Boston, 1959), pp. xvi, 333; see also Bush's "Keats and His Ideas," in *The Major English Romantic Poets: A Symposium in Reappraisal*, ed. Clarence D. Thorpe et al. (Carbondale, 1957), pp. 239-240. The view is sanctioned by Keats himself, who thought the poem was in some ways like *Isabella*—"too smokeable," with "too much inexperience of . . . [life], and simplicity of knowledge in it," "A weak-sided Poem"; when he later planned a new attempt in poetry, it was "the colouring of St Agnes eve" that he would "diffuse . . . throughout a Poem in which Character and Sentiment would be the figures to such drapery" (*The Letters of John Keats*, ed. Hyder E. Rollins, Cambridge, Mass., 1958, II, 174, 234).

2. R. H. Fogle, "A Reading of Keats's 'Eve of St. Agnes,'" *College English*, VI (1945), 328, 325.

3. Earl R. Wasserman, *The Finer Tone: Keats' Major Poems* (Baltimore, 1953), pp. 97-137, R. A. Foakes, *The Romantic Assertion* (London, 1958), pp. 85-94, and, at some points, Bernard Blackstone, *The Consecrated Urn* (London, 1959), pp. 275-288, may be included. While Foakes discusses among Keats's poems only *The Eve of St. Agnes*, the metaphysical critics as a group represent not so much an interpretation of the poem as a view of all Keats's poetry. As will appear presently, I think *The Eve of St. Agnes* illuminates a quite different view of Keats's concerns and achievement.

4. *I stood tip-toe*, l. 190; *Endymion*, l. 294-295.

5. The simile occurs in a letter to J. H. Reynolds, 3 May 1818 (*Letters*, I, 280-281). Porphyro's eagerness to get to Madeline hardly accords with

Keats's idea that "we care not to hasten" to "the second Chamber"; the identification of Madeline's bedroom with "the Chamber of Maiden-Thought" seems similarly unbecoming, since one of the effects of arriving in the latter is "that tremendous one of sharpening one's vision into the heart and nature of Man—of convincing ones nerves that the World is full of Misery and Heart-break, Pain, Sickness and oppression." Wasserman develops the comparison on pp. 116–125, only to withdraw the letter from consideration (because "the reading of the romance in the light of the prose statement suggests an allegorical interpretation") on pp. 131–132; but he subsequently returns to "the chambers of life" on pp. 159, 164.

6. So the critics sometimes write: e.g., "Porphyro has recognized that the dream-vision for which Madeline is preparing is an ascent to the 'chief intensity,' to the spiritual repetition of what we call happiness on earth; and therefore the feast and the music represent the sensuous and imaginative entrances into essence before the spiritual entrance through love. Consequently, when Porphyro passes into Madeline's chamber he first prepares the remarkably rich foods . . ." (Wasserman, p. 114).

7. I.v.96–97, 105; II.ii.26, 55, 61; III.iii.29–30, 18; II.ii.28; III.iii.37; II.ii.114; III.ii.82.

8. Lines 2, 64, and the rejected stanza following l. 56 (*The Poetical Works of John Keats*, ed. H. W. Garrod, 2nd ed., Oxford, 1958, p. 217).

9. See, among others, H. Buxton Forman, ed., *The Poetical Works and Other Writings of John Keats* (London, 1889), II, 84 n.; Roy P. Basler, *Explicator*, III (1944), item 1.

10. *Poetical Works*, ed. Garrod, p. 244.

11. For the variants see *Poetical Works*, ed. Garrod, pp. 245, 253.

12. *Leigh Hunt's London Journal*, II (1835), 18.

13. Sidney Colvin, *John Keats: His Life and Poetry* . . . (New York, 1925), p. 87 n.; F. E. L. Priestley, "Keats and Chaucer," *Modern Language Quarterly*, V (1944), 444.

14. *The Poetical Works and Other Writings of John Keats*, ed. H. B. and M. B. Forman (New York, 1938–39), V, 310. (This edition is hereafter cited as "Hampstead Keats.")

15. See Thomas B. Stroup, "Cymbeline, II, ii, and The Eve of St. Agnes," *English Studies*, XVII (1935), 144–145; Claude Lee Finney, *The Evolution of Keats's Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass., 1936), II, 557–558; *Times Literary Supplement*, 6 April, 4 May, 1 June 1946, pp. 163, 211, 259.

16. *Clarissa*, Shakespeare Head ed. (Oxford, 1930), V, 339–340.

17. Hampstead Keats, V, 318.

18. Foakes, p. 91 n., relates the feast to "Paynims" in l. 241, but says that "such suggestions are discontinued as Porphyro is transformed" by kneeling by the bed (297, 305–306) and by being "saved" through the completion of a spiritual journey (337–339).

19. I quote the revised stanza from one of Woodhouse's transcripts (W² in Garrod's *Poetical Works*). After hearing the new version, Woodhouse wrote to the publisher John Taylor, 19 September 1819, "I do apprehend it will render the poem unfit for ladies, & indeed scarcely to be mentioned to them among the 'things that are.'" Taylor replied six days later that if Keats "will not so far concede to my Wishes as to leave the passage as it originally

stood, I must be content to admire his Poems with some other Imprint" (*Letters*, II, 163, 183). According to Woodhouse's note heading the W² transcript of the poem, Keats "left it to his Publishers to adopt which [alterations] they pleased, & to revise the Whole." See my "The Text of 'The Eve of St. Agnes,'" *Studies in Bibliography*, XVI (1963), 207-212, and *The Texts of Keats's Poems* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), pp. 214-220, for argument urging that a new text be made, embodying revisions found in the late fair copy (Garrod's E) and those noticed as alterations (w) in the W² transcript.

20. Hampstead Keats, V, 309.

21. E.g., the lame and anticlimactic justification, "in sooth such things have been," as Porphyro's imagination expands from "sight of Madeline, / But for one moment" to the progression "speak, kneel, touch, kiss" (78-81); the picture of Porphyro gazing on Angela "Like 'puzzled urchin'" (129); and some of Porphyro's reactions, relayed with tongue in cheek by the narrator: "The lover's endless minutes slowly pass'd" (182), "lo!—how fast she slept" (252), "It seem'd he never, never could redeem / From such a stedfast spell his lady's eyes" (286-287).

22. This is the version recorded in the W² transcript. In Ben Jonson's quatrain, quoted by Hunt from Brand's *Popular Antiquities* and often cited in notes to Keats's poem, the assurance that the ritual produces "an empty dream" is worth recalling (*Leigh Hunt's London Journal*, II, 1835, 17).

23. *Hamlet*, IV.vii.176-179. The point is made by Stuart M. Sperry, Jr., "Madeline and Ophelia," *Notes and Queries*, new ser., IV (1957), 29-30.

24. Keats's conclusion seems a matter for unending debate. The metaphysical critics, remarking that the storm is "an elfin-storm from faery land" and that the lovers "glide, like phantoms" out of the castle, uniformly agree that Madeline and Porphyro transcend mortality, entering an otherworld of eternal felicity, while Angela, the Beadsman, and the warriors remain to die or writhe benightmared. But the "elfin-storm" is Porphyro's explanation; the narrator calls it "a tempest fell" of "frost-wind" and "sharp sleet," and other critics (e.g., Amy Lowell, *John Keats*, Boston, 1925, II, 175; Herbert G. Wright, "Has Keats's 'Eve of St Agnes' a Tragic Ending?" *Modern Language Review*, XL, 1945, 90-94; Bernice Slote, *Keats and the Dramatic Principle*, Lincoln, 1958, pp. 35-36) have suggested that the lovers face reality, perhaps even perish, in the storm. Still another view (Wright, p. 92) is that the lovers face penance in "that second circle of sad hell," the circle of carnal sinners in the fifth canto of the *Inferno*, in which (as Keats described it in his sonnet *On a Dream*) lovers are buffeted about in a storm very much like the one in *The Eve of St. Agnes*. It is possible that Porphyro is evil only to the extent that Madeline is a hoodwinked dreamer, that when she awakens from her dream the evil represented by him is correspondingly reduced, and a happy human conclusion is justified. But it seems doubtful, and one may at this point have to fall back on the remark of the publisher J. A. Hessey, "[Keats] is such a man of fits and starts he is not much to be depended on" (Edmund Blunden, *Keats's Publisher*, London, 1936, p. 56), or that of Haydon, "never for two days did he know his own intentions" (*The Diary of Benjamin Robert Haydon*, ed. Willard B. Pope, Cambridge, Mass., 1960, II, 317). Whatever the fate of the lovers, Woodhouse noted

that Keats "altered the last 3 lines to leave on the reader a sense of pettish disgust. . . . He says he likes that the poem should leave off with this Change of Sentiment" (*Letters*, II, 162-163).

25. When I read an earlier version of this paper before the English faculty of the University of Illinois, it was suggested that if Porphyro awakens Madeline to reality, he should be considered an agent of good in Keats's terms. It may be observed, however, (1) that Madeline dreams through the consummation; and (2) that Porphyro does not necessarily represent all aspects of reality, or even one aspect consistently throughout the poem. Contradiction arises mainly from the assumption of allegory.

26. A variant following l. 68 (*Poetical Works*, ed. Garrod, p. 451).

27. *Poetical Works*, ed. Garrod, p. 205.

28. I use the term "dip" advisedly. Moneta is speaking more narrowly of poet-dreamers, and part of the condemnation occurs in a passage that Woodhouse thought Keats "intended to erase."

29. Glen O. Allen, "The Fall of Endymion: A Study in Keats's Intellectual Growth," *Keats-Shelley Journal*, VI (1957), 37-57, argues authoritatively that the change occurred during the winter of 1817-18, while Keats was completing and revising *Endymion*. David Perkins, *The Quest for Permanence* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), p. 220, feels that "the over-all course of [Keats's] development might be partly described as a periodic, though gradually cumulative, loss of confidence in the merely visionary imagination."

STUART M. SPERRY

Tragic Irony in *The Fall of Hyperion*

AS PRELUDE to the dreamer's coming vision, the brief paragraph of eighteen lines with which the induction to *The Fall* begins clearly establishes Keats's major theme—the dream itself, taken, as from the first he always had, as the fundamental source of poetry:

Fanatics have their dreams, wherewith they weave
A paradise for a sect; the savage, too,
From forth the loftiest fashion of his sleep
Guesses at Heaven; pity these have not
Trac'd upon vellum or wild Indian leaf
The shadows of melodious utterance.
But bare of laurel they live, dream, and die;
For Poesy alone can tell her dreams,—
With the fine spell of words alone can save
Imagination from the sable chain
And dumb enchantment. Who alive can say,
"Thou art no Poet—may'st not tell thy dreams"?
Since every man whose soul is not a clod
Hath visions, and would speak, if he had lov'd
And been well nurtured in his mother tongue.
Whether the dream now purpos'd to rehearse
Be poet's or fanatic's will be known
When this warm scribe, my hand, is in the grave.
(1.1-18)

From Stuart M. Sperry, *Keats the Poet* (Princeton University Press, 1973), pages 316-335. Copyright © 1973 by Princeton University Press. Reprinted, slightly revised by the author, by permission of the author and the publisher.

The passage advances two different and even partly contradictory ideas. The first, dwelt on by Wordsworth in *The Excursion*,¹ concerns the *universality* of poetry. All men, from the fanatic to the savage, are dreamers and hence potentially poets. In one sense the poet is only he who can record his dreams, who writes them down as verse; for "Who alive can say, / 'Thou are no Poet—may'st not tell thy dreams?'" At the same time, however, the passage strongly suggests a necessary criterion of value, a *qualitative* distinction between the poet as mere dreamer and the dreamer as true poet. "In dreams," Keats says with Yeats, "begins responsibility." The fanatic, who speaks only to a sect, may discourse or write in numbers but cannot claim the title of a poet, for poetry, in this further sense, requires a meaning relevant to all mankind, a deeper universality. Nor can Keats himself be certain whether the dream he is about to recite "Be poet's or fanatic's." The introductory paragraph thus sets forth a necessary but complex relationship between the dream and poetry. Poetry commences with the dream, yet, in its further, ideal sense, transcends it. Indeed it is just the mystery of this relationship and the obvious questions that grow from it that is the primary concern of Keats's allegory.

The description of the garden where the dreamer finds himself is remarkable for its pastoral simplicity and quiet beauty; but it possesses also a special range of significance. Both in atmosphere and detail it recalls the Garden of Paradise and, more specifically, Milton's description of Eden in *Paradise Lost*. The "trees of every clime," the "Palm, myrtle, oak, and sycamore, and beech" (i.19-20), recall those catalogued in Milton's Garden; while the arbor, wreathed in scents and flowers, brings to mind the bower of Adam and Eve, with "flourets deck't and fragrant smells." The feast of summer fruits, or what remains of it, suggests the meal Eve prepares to entertain the angel Raphael. Even should the reader miss these echoes, the references to Proserpine, recalling Milton's famous simile, and more obviously to the "angel" and "our Mother Eve" (i.31) cannot readily be overlooked.

The use of such allusions creates a special context for interpreting the events the dreamer proceeds to relate—his eating of the fruits, his thirst and drinking of the mysterious vessel of juice, his deathlike swoon and sudden starting up "As if with wings" (i.59). On one level the meal constitutes, as Brian Wicker has perceptively written, "a substantial and sacramental union" between the poet and his present condition of awareness and the lost state of human innocence.² For it is significant that the feast is only the remainder of a meal and that it

contains, as the dreamer tells us, remnants of "pure kinds I could not know" (i.34). Through partaking of the fragments, he achieves communion with a former innocence and, specifically through Eve, with the universality of human experience that has descended from its loss.

The implications of the feast, however, are carried further in the effects it induces. The remnants the dreamer eats bring on a powerful yearning for the vessel and its juice:

And appetite,
More yearning than on earth I ever felt,
Growing within, I ate deliciously;
And, after not long, thirsted; for thereby
Stood a cool vessel of transparent juice.
(i.38-42)

Like the glass of nepenthe in Shelley's *Triumph of Life*, a fragment that bears comparison in many ways with Keats's, the detail and its interpretation are of vital consequence. For the draught the dreamer drinks, pledging as he does so all the living and the dead, is the "parent" of his theme. Clearly Keats was partly returning to the ending of the old *Hyperion*, where Apollo longs for wings and gains divinity through the knowledge he reads in Mnemosyne's face—

as if some blithe wine
Or bright *elixir* peerless I had drunk,
And so become immortal.
(iii.118-20)

However the new setting of the garden in *The Fall*, with its reminiscences of Eden and its first inhabitants, provides a strikingly different context for interpreting the dreamer's desire and the events that follow. Thus the aroused "appetite" (i.38) that seizes him recalls both the "quick'nd appetite" of Eve in her prophetic dream of temptation (*Paradise Lost*, v.30-93) and the "eager appetite" that actually seizes her in the Garden (ix.740). The dreamer relates, immediately after drinking the potion, how "down I sunk" into his deathlike swoon, just as Eve relates to Adam how she "*sunk down, / And fell asleep*" (v.91-92) after tasting the fruit in her dream. Keats's dreamer starts up suddenly "As if with wings," as Eve herself is momentarily borne up into the clouds by her guide, and as the beguiled couple imagine "Divinitie within them breeding wings" (ix.1010) after they have both eaten of the tree.

In the induction to *The Fall* Keats was reworking his earlier conception of Apollo's longing for poethood and deification, but the allegoric framework he devised to dramatize that longing gives it a new and more profound significance. The remains of the feast of summer fruits the dreamer tastes provide substantial knowledge of lost innocence and man's subsequent decline throughout the course of history. But the draught he thirsts for and drinks and to which he owes the vision that immediately follows seems in its effects to represent his own re-enactment of the Fall itself—the poet's recourse to the transforming power of the imagination. Partly with the help of Hazlitt, Keats had come to see an important analogy between man's Original Sin and the primal act of poetical conception, between the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil and the power of the imagination. For it was possible to regard the latter faculty as something less than an unqualified blessing. Just here the subtlety and insight of Milton's larger treatment of the Fall was so suggestive. Satan had approached Eve first by night and in a dream tempted her with the promised power of the forbidden fruit:

Taste this, and be henceforth among the Gods
Thy self a Goddess, not to Earth confin'd,
But sometimes in the Air, as wee, sometimes
Ascend to Heav'n.

(v.77-80)

Later the erring pair had both been tempted to believe the fruit would prove

of Divine effect
To open Eyes, and make them Gods who taste.

(ix.865-66)

They had been cruelly misled. The fact remained, however, that the promise of new power had not been totally deceitful. The fruit of the tree had indeed proved a guide to higher knowledge but in a way that neither Adam nor Eve, in their innocence, could possibly foresee. Partly through Christ's merciful intervention and partly through Adam's acceptance of the hardship his progeny must endure, the apparent disaster of the Fall had been translated into a meaningful drama of spiritual progress and final Redemption. All of this, while hardly new to Keats, was more than ever germane to his preoccupation with the nature of imaginative experience. *The Fall of Hyperion* reveals the way

in which the simple logic of his earlier metaphor of Adam's dream—"he awoke and found it truth"—could mature into a complex allegory of human suffering and tragic knowledge.

The change from the light and incense of the garden to the grim solemnity of the ancient sanctuary is vital to the sense of Keats's allegory. The change is that of moving from the realm of "Flora, and old Pan" to concern with "the agonies, the strife / Of human hearts," or from "the infant or thoughtless Chamber" to preoccupation with the "burden of the Mystery" (I, 280-81). It represents that growth from unthinking delight in pleasure to vision into the true nature and suffering of humanity that Keats, with "glorious fear,"³ had eagerly anticipated from the outset of his career. Yet the development we sense in *The Fall* is not merely the change from immaturity to maturity, but from innocence to experience and responsibility, nor is it unmingled with misgiving and regret. The temple, with its store of treasures, houses the enduring remains of human art and culture, the artifice of eternity, but its interior is forbidding:

The embossed roof, the silent massy range
Of columns north and south, ending in mist
Of nothing; then to eastward, where black gates
Were shut against the sunrise evermore.

(i.83-86)

The shut gates symbolize the impossibility of a return to innocence or to the garden; they bring to mind the great eastern gate of Paradise which closes behind the human pair following their loss of innocence and exclusion from bliss. Once inside there is no turning back. The only way lies forward toward the knowledge written in Moneta's face and to the struggle to achieve the understanding and transcendence of her vision. The task is no longer glorious but stern and demanding.

The shift in tone and imagery between the first and second versions of *Hyperion* is a primary clue toward determining the bent of Keats's new allegory. In comparison with the earlier version, the induction to *The Fall* is more religious than classical in tone and detail, more Christian than pagan. The temple the dreamer must enter if he is to become the poet is the memorial of human achievement and therefore timeless and classic in feeling. Yet the "strange vessels," the "Robes," and "holy jewelries" it contains are all suggestive of religious ritual.⁴ Nowhere

can the change be seen more clearly than in the contrast between Mnemosyne and Moneta. In *Hyperion* Mnemosyne is a "Goddess benign" whose gift to Apollo is the poet's golden lyre. In *The Fall* Moneta is a "Holy Power," a "priestess" who is first seen ministering before an altar where the dreamer later fears his mere utterance to be "sacrilegious" (i.140). She is not only a guide but a stern admonisher and judge, while the emblems that surround her and the words she speaks are both austere and holy. The speech addressed to him before her altar,

Thy flesh, near cousin to the common dust,
Will parch for lack of nutriment,—thy bones
Will wither in few years, and vanish. . . .
(i.109-11)

recalls the sentence pronounced by Christ upon Adam—"know thy Birth, / For dust thou art, and shalt to dust returne" (*Paradise Lost*, x.207-208). Her altar, hidden at first from the dreamer by clouds of fragrant smoke, resembles Milton's description of the holy Throne, where "of incense Clouds / Fuming from Golden Censers hid the Mount" (vii.599-600). So also the golden censer she holds—except for her veils, perhaps her most important emblem—brings to mind the "Golden Censer" in which Christ, God's "Priest," mingles those "Fruits of more pleasing savour," the prayers of the repentant Adam and Eve, before his offended Father in *Paradise Lost* (xi.22-30).

Such parallels are important not because they suggest Keats had suddenly become a convert to Christian dogma but rather because they confirm that the framework central to the allegory of *The Fall* is the conception of sin and expiation. The dreamer's struggle, unlike that of Apollo, is now not merely for rebirth as poet but against an "unworthiness" (i.182) inherent in his very nature. As Moneta later makes plain, he is, like all visionaries, guilty of a culpability not fully realized until now, and his reprieve from death seems only partly the result of his own tremendous exertion and partly the intervention of something resembling divine grace. The life-and-death struggle with which the first *Hyperion* ends is carried over and expanded in the second, but its context is changed in such a way as to give it an entirely new significance.

Like Dante's *Purgatorio*, the structure and logic of *The Fall* is that of redemptive ascent. The altar toward which the dreamer advances represents the higher condition he must achieve in rising from mere

visionary to poet. Just as the "floral censers" of the garden have given way to the golden one Moneta bears, so the "sweet food" she burns in sacrifice suggests a necessary transcendence of the sweet-smelling fruit the dreamer tasted earlier. It is precisely through the clouds of sweet but "sickening" incense, spreading abroad "Forgetfulness of everything but bliss," that he must ascend to clear perception of the pain written in her features. It is revealing to compare this progression to a passage from "Sleep and Poetry," the poem of purpose and self-dedication written three years before, at the outset of Keats's career, to which *The Fall* in so many ways looks back:

O Poesy! for thee I grasp my pen
That am not yet a glorious denizen
Of thy wide heaven; yet, to my ardent prayer,
Yield from thy sanctuary some clear air,
Smoothed for intoxication by the breath
Of flowering bays, that I may die a death
Of luxury, and my young spirit follow
The morning sun-beams to the great Apollo
Like a fresh sacrifice; or, if I can bear
The o'erwhelming sweets, 'twill bring to me the fair
Visions of all places.

(53-63)

Virtually all the major elements of the new induction are here—the notion of a poetic heaven or sanctuary, death and rebirth, sacrifice, the need to transcend the "o'erwhelming sweets" of verse, to achieve a point of vision—but jumbled incoherently together without the meaningful development and depth of Keats's allegory. For it is important to note that the draught the dreamer drinks—his rebirth in imagination—can lead as readily to a fool's paradise, the fate of those who rot upon Moneta's pavement, as to higher insight. His salvation is never possible until he has "mounted up" a *second* time: his swoon and starting up from the garden and his ascent of the stairs before Moneta's altar are central and contrasting movements.⁵ Clearly Keats's meaning is that the luxury and ease of imaginative enjoyment can obscure the hardship of the struggle for vision into the tragic nature of human existence that is required of the poet who would live.

The redemptive aim of Keats's allegory as well as its assimilation of the old epic elements is further clarified if we pursue the suggested parallel with *Paradise Lost*, now in particular in terms of the drama of

Milton's closing books. Thus the command to the dreamer to "ascend / These steps" (i.107-108) recalls the direction given by the angel Michael to Adam after the Fall, "Ascend / This Hill" (*Paradise Lost*, xi.366-67). And Michael and Adam "both ascend / In the Visions of God" (xi.376-77), just as Moneta, now the dreamer's guide, presents to him the vision of Saturn's desolation, a panorama of the past hardly less tremendous than the vision of the future Michael reveals to Adam. So also the plea the dreamer addresses to Moneta,

"High Prophetess," said I, "purge off,
Benign, if so it please thee, my mind's film,"
(i.145-46)

brings to mind the relation, only a few lines later in *Paradise Lost*, that

Michael from *Adams* eyes the *Filme* remov'd
Which that false Fruit that promis'd clearer sight
Had bred; then *purg'd* with Euphrasie and Rue
The visual Nerve, for he had much to see.
(xi.412-15)⁶

To some degree Eve's vain longing for divinity of knowledge is actually fulfilled through Adam's vision, but united now with full awareness of the tremendous agony and suffering he and his progeny must bear. In the same way the draught the dreamer consumes in the garden leads not to the experience of more intense enjoyment but to a deeper knowledge of human destiny and its pain.

What Keats was attempting to accomplish in the latter part of *The Fall of Hyperion* is reasonably clear. He was seeking to interpolate important sections of the narrative of the earlier *Hyperion* into his text as a higher vision of human life and destiny. From the metaphor of the Fall and the account of the dreamer's struggle to ascend he fashioned an allegory of sin, expiation, and atonement that could give genuine relevance to the old epic action. Like Adam's vision from the mount, the knowledge the dreamer gains is not merely given but in great part earned, a vision dramatizing Keats's own peculiar sense of the hardships and compensations of imaginative experience. The dreamer may transgress by tasting the fruit of the imagination yet wins redemption,

with Moneta's help and intervention, through dedication to the service of humanity. Like Dante's Beatrice or Milton's Christ, a major aspect of her role is that of a vicarious sufferer and redeemer. Although fated to survey "the giant agony of the world," he is to see it through her eyes and with her promise that what for her "is still a curse" shall be for him "a wonder," a vision "Free from all pain, if wonder pain thee not" (i.243-48).

As deeply relevant as it unquestionably is to Keats's new allegorical intention, the Christian story of the Fall and the various parallels it affords are insufficient fully to elucidate the fragment he again abandoned. For it is impossible to read *The Fall* through without realizing that the major issues it raises, and consequently its entire structure, are still in a process of evolution and that, as in so much of the earlier verse, its inner debate is never finally resolved. It is not just that the work is actively and progressively dialectical; the fact is that its dialectic is neither consistent nor conclusive. Much of the problem revolves around the conception of Moneta and the balance Keats had to strike between her role of interrogator and judge on the one hand and intercessor and redeemer on the other. The real difficulties become clear only when one examines in some detail the argument she addresses to her pupil.

Following his victorious struggle to ascend, Moneta makes the declaration that "None can usurp this height" but "those to whom the miseries of the world / Are misery" (i.147-49). However, when the dreamer looks about for others near him, those benefactors of humanity who, more like slaves than fellow men, "Labour for mortal good," he is disappointed in his search. Those whom he seeks are no visionaries, Moneta exclaims.

They seek no wonder but the human face,
No music but a happy-noted voice—
They come not here, they have no thought to come—
And thou art here, for thou art less than they.

(i.163-66)

Thus far the meaning of her words is clear and inescapable. The "height" to which the dreamer's struggle has carried him is not as eminent as it might at first appear. For what Moneta is saying is that the state of innocence—the freedom from imaginative longing and the knowledge to which that longing leads—is after all the best. Never to have thirsted for the juice of the garden, never to have entered the

temple and struggled up its steps, but to have remained content with humbly toiling for humanity would have been a greater virtue. The life of the selfless, unimaginative laborer for human welfare is best. The lesson Moneta reads is essentially the same as that with which Raphael admonishes the too curious Adam before the Fall:

Heav'n is for thee too high
To know what passes there; be lowly wise;
Think onely what concerns thee and thy being;
Dream not of other Worlds, what Creatures there
Live, in what state, condition or degree,
Contented that thus farr hath been reveal'd
Not of Earth onely but of highest Heav'n.

(viii.172-78)

However, like Adam, the dreamer has fallen and cannot recapture innocence. As we have seen, the whole design of Keats's allegory is an effort to define the way of his atonement. Through his struggle he has been "saved from death" (i.138). Though still tainted, a mere "fever" of himself, he nevertheless looks to Moneta to be "medicin'd / In sickness not ignoble" (i.169, 183-84), and, when he finally glimpses her face, he finds it blanched by "an immortal sickness" progressing not to corruption but toward a terrible purity. The seed of redemption lies in the very root of his illness. The logic of this progression, however, is violated by the unexpected fury of Moneta's violent condemnation in a passage that reveals how much the main lines of Keats's allegory were still susceptible to the pressure of major doubts and questions. There is no point in reopening the textual problem of the disputed lines (i.187-210), so often wrangled over in the past, except to observe that Keats undoubtedly wrote them, that they throw a revealing light on the development of his argument, and that our chief clue to interpreting them remains the note the careful Woodhouse made in marking the passage in his transcript, that "Keats seems to have intended to erase" them. Woodhouse's supposition appears correct, for the distinction Moneta proceeds to draw is potentially disastrous to Keats's argument:

Art thou not of the dreamer tribe?
The poet and the dreamer are distinct,
Diverse, sheer opposite, antipodes.

(i.198-200)

Up to here the whole point of Keats's narrative has been that the poet *is* the dreamer but something more, that the essential distinction between them is qualitative, not generic.⁷

One may readily concede the probability that Keats recognized his error, that he clearly intended to omit the passage. Nevertheless there is little justification in therefore dismissing it as entirely irrelevant. The mere fact that he could compose the lines is of itself revealing. The passage suggests how much, despite the careful design apparent throughout the whole of the induction, the underlying question Keats had put so simply on March 19, "Yet may I not in this be free from sin," remained unsettled in his mind. It suggests how much, despite an undeniable consistency of metaphor, the deeper evolution of his poem was once again the product not of any fixed intention but of an active process of self-interrogation and discovery. What the passage prepares us for, if by this time we needed any special preparation, is another work whose argument is exploratory and probational and never fully secure from the ironies of genuine uncertainty and ambivalence.

Such irresolution, barely sensed in the dialectics of Moneta's debate with her disciple, emerges more clearly as the poem proceeds. *The Fall* is a visionary work, and its mystery is more than anywhere expressed within its single most important passage—the dreamer's vision of Moneta's face. At the end of the first *Hyperion* Keats had presented the deification of Apollo merely through the "Knowledge enormous" he reads in Mnemosyne's countenance. The rush of names, deeds, and legends suggests only an intellectual enlightenment. The description of Moneta's features in *The Fall*, however, evokes an emotion equivalent to the far greater vision of the fallen Titans the dreamer is about to behold through her eyes, and thus effectively conveys its pain and sadness:

Then saw I a wan face,
Not pined by human sorrows, but bright-blanch'd
By an immortal sickness which kills not;
It works a constant change, which happy death
Can put no end to; deathwards progressing
To no death was that visage; it had pass'd
The lily and the snow; and beyond these
I must not think now, though I saw that face.
But for her eyes I should have fled away.
They held me back with a benignant light,
Soft mitigated by divinest lids

Half closed, and visionless entire they seem'd
Of all external things—they saw me not,
But, in blank splendour, beam'd like the mild moon,
Who comforts those she sees not, who knows not
What eyes are upward cast.

(i.256-71)

The passage is central to an understanding of the events that follow, for the description of Moneta's features and the scene upon which she stares are related to each other as tragic perception and emotion are related to the essence of human experience. It dramatizes the truth of Keats's earlier conviction that "Knowledge is Sorrow" (1, 279) and that the poet must be one "who has kept watch on Man's Mortality" (1, 173). Only by sharing her vision of the downcast Titans and comprehending its sorrow can Keats's dreamer gain absolution from his curse and rise to the stature of a poet.

The description of Moneta's features seems calculated to invite interpretation by analogy; and unquestionably the most compelling has been that suggested by D. G. James, who, like many critics after him, saw reflected in them the agony of the suffering Christ.⁸ The parallel is no less striking than germane, for it supports the idea of her redemptive role implied throughout the course of Keats's narrative. Nevertheless the more one studies the passage within the context of what follows, the less such an interpretation seems, by itself, sufficient. The conception of Moneta's suffering as an "immortal sickness" involves a paradox not ordinarily associated with the finality of Christ's passion. Her suffering is a living death, a misery that never ends but must endure through countless ages. In the continuous wasting of her features, the mutable and the immutable, the temporal and the eternal are both contained and reconciled. Such agony is difficult even to imagine; yet there have been other attempts to portray it. While suggesting the agony of the Crucifixion, Moneta's suffering seems more nearly to recall the despairing words Adam speaks near the end of Book Ten of *Paradise Lost*, just as he begins to comprehend the destiny of his offspring, which he is shortly to behold in vision from the mount:

But say
That Death be not one stroak, as I suppos'd,
Bereaving sense, but endless miserie
From this day onward, which I feel begun

Both in me, and without me, and so last
To perpetuities.

(x.808-13)

Filled with new understanding and sympathy for his unfortunate progeny, while lacking any hope for their recovery, Adam laments that he is doomed to "die a living Death" (x.788), a fear justified by the epic spectacle of human misery about to unfold before him. In a similar way, the sorrow the dreamer finds in Moneta's face is the essential knowledge of the plight of Saturn and Thea, understood as a symbol of world fate, which he must perceive through her eyes.⁹

What is most significant about the dreamer's rapt perception of Moneta and her contemplation is the way it wavers between two orders of vision. The first is the type of Adam's divinely mediated vision from the mount; the other is his unreconstructed view of the hopeless misery of his fallen offspring. As we have seen, the main development of *The Fall* unmistakably suggests the intention to represent the dreamer's sin as expiable, as, in fact, a kind of *felix culpa* bringing a knowledge of higher good as well as an inevitable pain and hardship. When, through parted veils, Moneta offers to reveal the scenes contained within her brain, the dreamer, like Apollo, seems on the point of ultimate comprehension. The vision she reflects, however, even while mitigated by the light of her benignant eyes, is singularly cheerless and somber, a realization that is closer to resignation—perhaps even despair—than to hope. In the earlier *Hyperion* the myth of the fallen Titans had served as the background for a view of universal hope and progress. Despite their cruel heartbreak, there is no doubt that a power prevails within their universe working through destruction and perpetual change toward ultimate perfection—the theme of Oceanus's great speech. Moneta's gaze, however, seems to comprehend only a consciousness of endless process, an eternal "deathwards progressing / To no death," an undetermined and interminable progression without apparent hope or purpose too terrifying to conceive ("I must not think now, though I saw that face"). It is the vision of the fallen Adam unrelied by any promise of redemption, the vision of our modern age.

Keats's inability to dramatize any reconciling hope of comfort or assurance in Moneta's features is only too clearly reflected in what follows. The expected transcendence and breadth and grasp of vision are never realized. The power "of enormous ken," the ability to "see as a god sees" (i.303-304) which the dreamer feels growing within him as

he stands upon the height he has won, is slowly lost within the shadows of the solitary vale. Instead there are the terrible lines, among the last Keats added to the older narrative, that describe the dreamer's prolonged agony as he beholds, hour after hour, the misery of Saturn and Thea:

Oftentimes I pray'd
Intense, that death would take me from the vale
And all its burthens—Gasping with despair
Of change, hour after hour I curs'd myself.
(i.396-99)

The passage goes beyond the "vale of Soul-making," the speculation invented in the spring to justify and explain "a World of Pains and troubles" (II, 102), to what Keats was to call his "posthumous existence" (II, 359). Only in his final letters can one find the counterpart of such despair. "Is there another Life? Shall I awake and find all this a dream? There must be we cannot be created for this sort of suffering" (II, 346). What had begun as the metaphor of Adam's dream was to end as the tragic and unfinished allegory of Keats's life, a drama mirrored in the inconclusive ending of *The Fall*. Throughout the agony of the dreamer's vigil one recollects the hardship of another spectacle and Adam's forlorn cry:

O Visions ill foreseen! better had I
Liv'd ignorant of future, so had borne
My part of evil onely, each dayes lot
Anough to bear.

(xi.763-66)

There can be no disputing that, had he lived, Keats might have gone on to revise and to complete *Hyperion*. The possibilities it contains for further development are myriad. Nevertheless we are left with the fragment he abandoned and with the mystery of his inability to complete the project that so preoccupied him, on and off, during the whole of his great year of poetic achievement. Although still occasionally presented in such terms, the deeper problem was not one of technical considerations, any more than it was that of supplying a mere termination to the poem. It was the task of reconciling the need for a coherent framework of traditional allegory with an entire openness to the full complexity of man's experience and with an emerging sense of the

desolating loneliness and isolation of the modern poet's view. The poem derives its primary impulse from a commitment to the value and discipline of a form of spiritual and allegorical progression that can be traced as far back as "Sleep and Poetry," a form characteristic of all the great narrative poetry Keats looked to as his models. At every stage, however, within the gradual evolution of *The Fall*, the challenges and hardships to which the dreamer must submit become more arduous, the promises of consolation more uncertain, and the ascent more terrifying and insecure. The visionary framework cannot sustain the weight of human need and questioning it must support.

The root of the problem really lies in the distinction posed at the very outset of the poem's induction: that between dream and vision. The poem turns upon Keats's desire, indeed his vital need, to discriminate between the two, while at the same time preserving the grounds of a common unity. Like so much of his earlier verse from *Endymion* onward, but in a way that is more urgent, moving, and humane, *The Fall* represents his last effort to *spiritualize* the dreamer into visionary. It embraces the attempt to achieve the clarity of vision—in the full sense Keats intended—through entire fidelity to the imagination and its processes, to the creative potential of the dream. Yet the prospect that rewards the dreamer at the end of his struggle, the vision of Moneta's eternally wasted features, seems to hold only a recognition of ceaseless change and process. There is no discernible end to his vigil and no resolution to the pain he beholds. While straining toward the redemptive promise of the second Adam, the vision expresses the tragic knowledge of the first. The image of Moneta that the dream distills transcends the visionary framework that would contain it. It is rather the expression of a deeper honesty—a recognition that the pain of human consciousness must be borne without the hope of any divine intercession. *The Fall of Hyperion* is the final triumph of the metaphor of Adam and his dream. It is the supreme expression of tragic irony in Keats's work.

NOTES

1. See the notes to the poem in Douglas Bush's *John Keats: Selected Poems and Letters* (Boston, 1959). Quotations from the poetry are from this edition and are included in the text. Quotations from Keats's letters are from

The Letters of John Keats, 1814-1821, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins, 2 vols. (Cambridge, Mass., 1958) and are also included in the text.

2. "The Disputed Lines in *The Fall of Hyperion*," *Essays in Criticism*, VII (1957), 40, to which I am indebted. Wicker's interpretation of the dreamer's drinking the draught as a sacramental and therefore necessary communion with the past differs from my own reading of the episode in the light of man's fall and original sin; but I do not see the two emphases in the end (as my later discussion indicates) as mutually exclusive. See also the most recent study of the two *Hyperions*, Geoffrey Hartman's "Spectral Symbolism and the Authorial Self: An Approach to Keats's *Hyperion*," *Essays in Criticism*, XXIV (1974), 1-19, which sees the whole venture growing out of the theme of trespass and profanation. For helpful clues as to Keats's reinterpretation of *Paradise Lost*, I am indebted to John D. Rosenberg's suggestive discussion of Keats's relationship to Milton in "Keats and Milton: The Paradox of Rejection," *Keats-Shelley Journal*, VI (1957), 87-95.

3. "Sleep and Poetry," 128.

4. Lowes traced many details in this section of the poem to the description of the Covenantal Ark and Tabernacle of the Lord in the Book of Exodus, which Keats had probably been reading ("Moneta's Temple," *PMLA*, LI [1936], 1098-1113).

5. David Perkins has commented on this relationship in *The Quest for Permanence* (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), p. 281.

6. My italics, except for proper names. Undoubtedly Keats also had in mind a part of the invocation to Book III:

the *mind* through all her powers
Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence
Purge and disperse,

(iii.52-54)

a passage of which he took special note in his copy of Milton.

7. The point has been convincingly argued by Murry in "The Poet and the Dreamer," *Keats* (London, 1955), pp. 242-43. In *Keats and Shakespeare* (London, 1925), Murry had earlier placed his finger on the major confusion the disputed lines introduced, "because the word 'dreamer' now bears an utterly different sense. The 'dreamer' here is the mere romanticist" (p. 179).

8. See James's excellent study of the two *Hyperions* in *The Romantic Comedy* (London, 1948), reprinted in W. J. Bate's *Keats: A Collection of Critical Essays* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1964), pp. 161-69.

9. Cf. Murry: "The fate of Saturn is a symbol of the destiny of the world, and Moneta is a symbol of the world made conscious of its own vicissitude" (*Keats and Shakespeare*, p. 182).